

AFTER GOD'S HEART:
A SEMINAR TO EQUIP PASTORS WITH
THE PROCESS OF THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLIZATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis culminates in an eight-hour seminar designed to equip pastors with the process of principlization. The seminar focuses on the utilization of the Ladder of Abstraction in deriving a timeless principle from a biblical text.

Biblical application is authoritative application. The major premise of this work is that preachers should go through a process of theological principlization in validating their applications. Exposition demands authoritative application. Authoritative application comes only from the author's intent.

The need for this thesis became apparent through bibliographic research which revealed limited works covering the process of principlization. Chapter two affirms the need to principlize and the validity of the method. In chapter three, different application methods, approaches and models related to principlization are reviewed.

The seminar is presented in chapter four in three sessions. The first session defines and explores the advantages of principlization. Different degrees of authority are introduced to highlight the need for principlization. The second session concentrates on the Ladder of Abstraction in a homiletical context. Different techniques are used in abstracting a biblical text into a principle. In the third session, authorial intent and literary form are the two tools introduced to validate the principle.

Chapter five is personal reflection about the writing of this thesis and the teaching experiences of two pilot seminars. It also recommends several areas for future studies. Lesson plans and handouts for each session are included in the appendices.

The bibliography provided focuses on books, dissertations, theses, essays and articles on principlization. It is deliberately thorough to provide a reference for future studies in this area.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter identifies the need to equip pastors with the process of theological principlization and preludes a seminar designed to address this need.

Identification of the Problem

Expository preaching demands both accuracy to the text and relevancy to the listener. In his book *Biblical Preaching*, Robinson defines expository preaching as:

. . . the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.¹

Though the word “applies” occurs twice in the definition, not much was written about application in a preaching context before 1980.² Even *Biblical Preaching*, in both editions (1980 and 2001), has little to say about application. Hence, pastors who were taught homiletics using *Biblical Preaching* as their major text have little training in extracting applications from their exegesis. This may explain why preachers are able to

¹ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 21.

² *Biblical Preaching* is one of the few standard homiletic texts that include application as an element in its text in the early 1980's. Examples of homiletic texts that are weak or without application in their definitions: James Barga, *How to Prepare Bible Messages* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1969); Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986); Harold Freeman, *Variety in Biblical Preaching: Innovative Techniques and Fresh Forms* (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1987); Donald L. Hamilton, *Homiletical Handbook* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992); Charles W. Koller, *Expository Preaching Without Notes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962); Wayne McDill, *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994); Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1955).

achieve excellent exegesis, yet are weak in deriving sermon application. The application is weak because the process of abstracting it is deficient in linking the specific application back to the text, demonstrating how it is derived, and how it carries the authority of “thus says the Lord.”

Since the mid-1980’s, a great deal has been specifically written about application.³ Newer hermeneutic volumes have begun to dedicate a section to application.⁴ Robinson wrote two practical articles on the topic in the 1990’s.⁵ As of this writing, there are close to a hundred books, articles, and theses dedicated to the topic of application.⁶ Together, they offer different approaches and dimensions to the subject. Yet, among these, only a few cover techniques involved in abstracting a theological principle from a biblical text. The majority of those who subscribe to the principization process dedicate their efforts to assuring the validity of the method or in listing the criteria for formulating such a principle. Seldom do they offer the how-to’s of abstracting such a principle.⁷

³ See bibliography on pages 160-172.

⁴ Some examples of these texts are: Ron Julian, J. A. Crabtree, and David Crabtree, *The Language of God: A Commonsense Approach to Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001); Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1990); and J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reaching, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001) .

⁵ See bibliography on pages 164, 170.

⁶ Only those dedicated exclusively to the subject of application are counted. See bibliography for a complete list.

⁷ See Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 19-25; 203-211. Duvall and Hays list four steps in their “interpretive journey”: (1) grasp the text in their town by summarizing the original situation; (2) measure the width of the river. (3) cross the principizing bridge by listing the theological principles communicated by the passage; and (4) grasp the text in our town. Out of the sixteen pages describing the application process, only six paragraphs-- less than two pages--are dedicated to crossing the principizing bridge. Some preachers, like Ramesh Richard, *Scripture Sculpture: A Do-It-Yourself Manual for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), principize so intuitively that their texts take a big jump

Due to the scarcity of the materials,⁸ indifference in this area among preachers is not surprising. A recent survey of twenty-five preachers mainly from North America⁹ who are familiar with Robinson's expository preaching shows their lack of exposure to recent application literature, and hence to the principization process.

Effective expository preachers need to be skilled in the principization process. Familiarity with the process will provide preachers an invaluable asset in helping their congregations to apply the Scripture. Hence, a continuing education seminar is needed to introduce a workable method in extracting application from the biblical texts. Such a seminar is outlined in "Chapter Four: The Process of Theological Principization." The same survey mentioned earlier also confirms the general assumption that pastors are diligent workers and are eager to learn. Over four-fifths of the pastors surveyed are willing to attend such a seminar were it to be offered.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this thesis is to produce an eight-hour seminar for pastors to equip them with the process of theological principization. Preachers who are familiar with Robinson's "big idea" of expository preaching will benefit most from this seminar

from the central proposition of the text (CPT) to the central proposition of the sermon (CPS) without showing the readers how to principize. His only mention of such a technique occurs once on page 208, endnote #5: "I suggest that an effective 'purpose' bridge preserves and provides for the preacher to be an artist while not allowing an uncontrolled and uncontrollable 'openness,' which will rob the text of its authority."

⁸ Chapter Two: Literature Review will further document this scarcity.

⁹ The survey was administered in March 2006 to the Doctor of Ministry participants in *The Preacher and the Message* cohort at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The participants consisted of twenty-five preachers: twenty from the United States, two from Jamaica, two from Canada, and one from the United Kingdom. The survey was given at the end of their three-year D. Min. program. Their average score in ranking twenty-two recent works on application, on a Likert scale of 1 to 5 (1 = never heard of the title; 2 = seen the title before; 3 = read the work; 4 = understand the work; and 5 = applying as proposed), was 1.48. These pastors have an average of thirteen years of ministry experience and work an average of fifty-six hours per week.

because the process and techniques presented will follow in the same vein of Robinson's philosophy. Lake outlined this vein as three hermeneutical presuppositions and five definitional components.¹⁰

The pilot version of the seminar will be presented to seminarians and pastors. Feedback will be gathered, analyzed, and incorporated into the future development of the seminar. This eight-hour seminar will consist of three sessions. It can be conducted in one day, over a weekend, or one session per week over a three-week period.

The purpose of this eight-hour seminar is to:

1. Reinforce the concept of "applies to the hearers" in Robinson's expository preaching.
2. Reaffirm the necessity of application.
3. Familiarize pastors with the process of principlization.
4. Make preachers aware of the necessity of validating their applications.
5. Provide resources for further research and studies.

At the end of this seminar, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the process of principlization.
2. State the advantages of principlization.
3. Identify non-authoritative application from a given text.
4. Abstract a biblical text using the Ladder of Abstraction.
5. Name three continuities between the biblical and modern world.
6. Name the two major theological components in crossing the two worlds.

¹⁰ Judson Shepherd Lake, "An Evaluation of Haddon Robinson's Homiletical Method: An Evangelical Perspective" (Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, 2003), 115-155. The three hermeneutical presuppositions are: (1) the basis of the message, (2) the result of applying biblical interpretation to the sermon, and (3) author-oriented hermeneutics. The five definitional components are: (1) the passage governs the sermon; (2) the expositor communicates a concept; (3) the concept comes from the text; (4) the concept is applied to the expositor; and (5) the concept is applied to the hearers.

7. Demonstrate to another participant how to derive an application from a passage.

Chapter two of this thesis project provides biblical and theological reflections on the process of principlization. Special attention will be given to the theological and biblical foundation of this process. Chapter three is a focused literature review that describes those works that contribute to the study of theological principlization. Two other prominent and distinct models are also reviewed in light of principlization. Chapter four is the seminar outline and is divided into three sessions. Chapter five is a report of what was learned from this study including the teaching of the seminar and feedback from the participants.

Importance of this Study

This study is important for six reasons: first, the ultimate goal of expository preaching is not only to expound the Scripture, but also to communicate application of the Word to the audience. Without application, the whole process of expository preaching is aborted prematurely. This not only wastes time and effort, but also displeases God.

Second, preachers are not authorities in and of themselves. Their authority comes from the biblical text they are interpreting and applying to the audience before them. Familiarity with the process of principlization will enable preachers to derive the specific application with confidence and assess the application with certainty of authority.

Third, preachers using Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* as their major homiletical text need more training in the area of sermon application. Learning how to principlize the text will facilitate the preachers' desires to help their congregations apply biblical concepts.

Fourth, familiarity with the principlization process will heighten the need of validity in application. As Robinson once commented, “More heresy is preached in application than in Bible exegesis.”¹¹ The presupposition of “one interpretation and many applications” has been misused as “one interpretation and *any* application.” This study will equip preachers to be more conscientious in their construction of sermon applications.

Fifth, since only limited works provide the how-to’s in the process of principlization, this seminar and its related materials will fill in a gap among the current literature about principlization. The ladder of abstraction in a homiletical context is especially applicable in this process.

Sixth, the gathering of literature, dissertations, theses, and articles that contribute to the subject of theological principlization into one single volume will help future researchers in this area of study.

¹¹ Haddon Robinson, “The Heresy of Application.” Interview by Edward K. Rowell in *Leadership Journal* 18: 4 (Fall 1997): 20-27.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

This chapter will examine the theological foundation of two issues: (1) the need of principlization and (2) the process of principlization. This theological foundation of principlization will prove that it is a valid and relevant process for constructing application from Scripture.

Tension Exists between the Timely and Timeless Natures of the Bible

The Bible, God's Word, is both timely and timeless.¹ The tension between these two qualities requires preachers to reconcile the differences in deriving scriptural application.

The Scripture is Timely

God's Word was completed at least 1900 years² ago. It is timely because it was written to specific groups of people during specific times in history under specific circumstances for specific purposes. It is a record of *then*, timely events and history. God banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3). He told Noah to build an ark (Gen. 6). He confused the language of the people and scattered them all over the earth

¹ Jack Kuhatschek, *Taking the Guesswork Out of Applying the Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 1990), 29-31.

² The Pentateuch was written by Moses around 1400 B.C., and Revelation was written by the apostle John around 90 A.D.

(Gen. 11). He promised Abraham a son (Gen. 15). He called Moses to deliver His people out from Egypt (Exod. 3). His wrath subsided because of Moses' plea for His people (Gen. 32). He let His people experience defeat because Achan kept the spoils against His will (Josh. 7). Through Samuel, He indicated His displeasure of His people when they sought a king like the other nations and warned them about the consequences (1 Sam. 8, 12). He sent the angel Gabriel to announce His son's birth (Luke 1). He struck Ananias and Sapphira for their dishonesty (Acts 5).

Throughout the Bible, God has been active in people's lives and communicating His message in words to them. His sovereign interaction with mankind has always been perfect in timing and circumstance. The Bible is a record of this interaction. However, because this record addresses "a specific people's needs in a historical-cultural form which was immediately understood"³ by them, believers may envision the texts as locked in their own historical-cultural frames and irrelevant to their modern lives. Because of this historical-cultural specificity the Scriptures are "timely".

The Scripture is Timeless

On the other hand, according to Jesus, the Scripture is timeless: "Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished."⁴ God's Word is effective.⁵ The revelational nature of the Bible demands application from its

³ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 159.

⁴ Matthew 5:18 (NIV).

⁵ Cf. Isaiah 55:11; Hebrews 4:12.

contemporary audience.⁶ When God inspired His Word, He wanted His people throughout the ages to respond to His word. He wants them to understand His desires and sympathize with His heart. Life changes are the ultimate goals of any Bible study, exegesis, or sermon. With this application-oriented purpose, the Bible is timeless, unlimited by time and culture. The Bible assures its own relevancy. Therefore, it speaks to all people at all times.

Discontinuities: Chasm Exists Between the Two Worlds

Obviously, today's Christians can apply some commands like, "You shall not steal," and "You shall not murder." But the majority of the passages in the Bible do not directly or in any sense resemble today's situations, people, problems, and questions. How can one apply the Scripture relevantly and authoritatively? Preachers must recognize the distance between the two worlds: the biblical world when and where the Scripture was written and the modern world when and where contemporary Christians are living. The biblical world is the *then* in the Scriptures, in which the preacher must be concerned about meaning, the biblical audience, and "Thus says the Lord." The modern world is the *now*, in which preachers must additionally be concerned about significance, their contemporary audiences, and "Thou art the man."⁷

Fosdick is credited with being the first to advocate a bridging method in preaching. Commenting on the mediocre sermons of his time and arguing for sermons

⁶ 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; James 1:22-25; Matthew 7:24-27. Brian Jones points out that application is God's desire for preaching because communication is central to the personality of God. He listed four arguments to support his proposition: (1) God's role as Creator demands communication; (2) God as a Social Being; (3) God's communication is application-oriented, and (4) the Bible's use of itself. See Brian Jones, "Application in Biblical Preaching," (D.Min. thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2003), 4-20.

⁷ Richard, *Scripture Sculpture*, 18.

relevant to the lives and problems of the contemporary audience, he called for a “project method” in homiletics which projects the biblical text over a chasm to the contemporary audience. “A sermon, then, is an engineering operation by which a chasm is spanned so that spiritual goods on one side are actually transported into personal lives upon the other.”⁸ In the 1980’s, Anthony Thiselton introduced the image of two horizons and some of the barriers between them. Yet, he came short of offering any concrete method or model other than suggesting “the hermeneutical goal is that of a steady progress towards a fusion of horizons . . . respecting the rights of the text and allowing it to speak.”⁹

Though Stott popularized this bridge-building-between-two-worlds concept, he failed to describe how it should be done.¹⁰ It wasn’t until 1987 and 1988, when Kaiser and Greidanus respectively offered fuller discussions on the issues of applying the biblical text to the contemporary audience.¹¹

Between the biblical and modern worlds, there is a chasm. Craddock describes the chasm as “the geographical, linguistic, psychological, cosmological and chronological gulf between the ancient Near East and modern America.”¹² Zuck lists six gaps: a time gap, a space gap, the customs gap, a language gap, a writing gap, and a

⁸ Harry Emerson Fosdick, “What’s the Matter with Preaching?” in *What’s the Matter with Preaching Today?* Mike Graves, ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 17. This article originally appeared in *Harper’s Monthly Magazine*, vol. 151 (July 1928): 133-41.

⁹ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1980), 445.

¹⁰ John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1982).

¹¹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Rediscovering of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987); Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*.

¹² Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 117.

spiritual gap.¹³ Warren adds five more gaps: institutions, values, beliefs, attitude, and behavior.¹⁴ Greidanus summarized these as the historical-cultural gap¹⁵ which can be divided into three levels of discontinuities: progressive revelation, stages of kingdom history, and cultural changes.¹⁶ They set apart two different worldviews: the biblical world and the modern world.

These discontinuities are often viewed as obstacles to relevant and authoritative application.¹⁷ Preachers need to deal with these discontinuities in order to bring an authoritative “thus says the Lord” application to the modern world.

The Need of Bridging the Two Worlds

What preachers need is a model that “sufficiently attends both the changeless text . . . and the ever-changing audience.”¹⁸ “Biblical preaching is the relating of biblical truth to contemporary life . . . [I]t confronts the hearers with an accurate interpretation of

¹³ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1991), 15-18.

¹⁴ Timothy S. Warren, (notes from DM455 *Preaching Topical Expository Sermons*, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, Winter, 2007).

¹⁵ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 158.

¹⁶ Ibid., 167-69. Concerning the different stages of kingdom history, there are far greater discontinuities between the two testaments than Greidanus has stated. Richard entertained these discontinuities and how they affect what preachers can deem relevant from the Old Testament. See Ramesh Richard, “Methodological Proposals for Scripture Relevance, Part 4: Application Theory in Relation to the Old Testament.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143: 572 (October-December 1986): 304-11.

¹⁷ Richard, “Application Theory in Relation to the Old Testament,” 304-7. Richard points out that the dissimilarities between the Old Testament administration mode and that of the New Testament “preempts the direct use of the Old Testament today.”

¹⁸ Timothy S. Warren, “A Paradigm for Preaching,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148: 592 (October-December 1991): 470.

the biblical revelation and its present meaning for their lives.”¹⁹ “It must deal with the ‘then of the text’ and ‘the now of our time.’”²⁰ This need is best summarized by Scro: “How can a preacher derive application that is biblically authoritative and then dispense it in such a way that the audience is convinced of that authority?”²¹

Unsuccessful Attempts in Bridging the Gaps

Before presenting a workable model, what follows are some common methods that have been used to bridge (or not to bridge) this chasm and how they have fallen short in presenting a workable model in application that carries the authority of “Thus says the Lord.”

Common Inadequate Methods of Bridging

Asking Applicational Questions

This method is common to most Bible study method books. Usually it consists of a series of questions to help Christians in reflecting and evaluating their spiritual lives. Some methods utilize a grid or a creative acronym in asking those questions.²² Rick Warren’s application acrostic is a fancy one:

1. Is there an Attitude to adjust?
2. Is there a Promise to claim?

¹⁹ Freeman, *Variety in Biblical Preaching*, 26.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

²¹ Joseph F. Scro, abstract to “The Pastor as Judge: Applying the Law of God from the Pulpit” (D.Min. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993).

²² Samples of these questions can be found in Oletta Wald, *The Joy of Discovery in Bible Study*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1975), 89-91; and Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 304-8.

3. Is there a Priority to change?
4. Is there a Lesson to learn?
5. Is there an Issue to resolve?
6. Is there a Command to obey?
7. Is there an Activity to avoid or stop?
8. Is there a Truth to believe?
9. Is there an Idol to tear down?
10. Is there an Offense to forgive?
11. Is there a New direction to take?
12. Is there a Sin to confess?²³

While these questions can assist one's responses to a text, they do not provide much control in the process of application²⁴ even if the text is interpreted accurately. For example, is Gideon's "putting a fleece out" (Jud. 6: 36-40) an example for today's believers to "put a fleece out" in determining God's will? This method is subjective and does not insure consistency or orthodoxy.

Direct Transference

This method assumes the immediacy of biblical relevance to the contemporary audience. Biblical truth is transferred from the biblical world to the modern world with few, if any, adaptations.²⁵ Promises, commands, teachings and examples are personalized and applied to individuals. Thus, Jesus' command to his disciples to wash one another's feet, (John 13), becomes a command to every 21st century believer to wash

²³ Rick Warren, "Three Ways to Apply Scripture," *Ministry ToolBox Issue* #260, (May 24, 2006), 1 <http://www.pastors.com/RWMT/default.asp?id=260&artid=4529&expand=1> (accessed July 10, 2006).

²⁴ Hendricks sees the need of control in application. That is why he follows his chapter on the questions with a chapter on principlization. See Hendricks and Hendricks, *Living by the Book*, 316-23. This researcher believes these questions are helpful only after the principlization and contextualization process are done. After that listeners can personalize their own actions by asking themselves these questions.

²⁵ Ernest Best, *From Text to Sermon: Responsible Use of the New Testament in Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 55.

each others' feet. Though this "approach is effective where there is theological continuity between the biblical teaching of "then" and "now,"²⁶ it is inadequate because situations are never the same, and concepts always change.²⁷ How the disciples understood foot washing was completely different from what today's society understands about foot washing.

Devotional

This method considers the Bible as a historical record of God's revelation to the biblical world at that moment. The Scripture *was* God's revelation, but it *is not* God's revelation. According to this method, revelation now consists of the ideas that come to a believer while he is reading the Bible.²⁸ According to this method, that David "stayed home," (2 Sam. 11:1) can be personally applied to keep busy to avoid adultery, and "Why do we sit here until we die?" (2 Kings 7:3) can be a message to become pro-active."²⁹ This existential approach rests the application in a subjective, personal revelation of God through the text instead of the authorial intent expressed through the text. This method is incompatible with a high view of Scripture about revelation and inspiration that rests the authority in the inerrant text.

²⁶ John William French, "Virtue and Vice: the Personal Application of Epistolary Ethical Lists in their Historical, Canonical, and Hermeneutical Contexts" (Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, 2003). 115.

²⁷ Best, 56-57.

²⁸ James D. Smart, *The Strange Silence of the Bible in the church: A Study in Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: the Westminster Press, 1970), 49.

²⁹ Examples are taken from Timothy S. Warren, "An Authoritative Homiletic," (article distributed in DM455 *Preaching Topical Expository Sermons*, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, Winter 2007), 8.

Allegorizing

In their attempts to make the Scripture relevant, early church fathers abandoned the historicity of the text and imposed subjective, arbitrary symbolic meaning to biblical objects and characters. For example, Origen likened the cleansing of the temple in John 2 to the cleansing of one's soul. The ox symbolized earthly things, and the sheep symbolized brutal things. He reasoned that in a similar way, Christians should allow Christ to cleanse their souls of these things.³⁰ This is a subjective method in which preachers can derive any meaning from any text they choose. It "fails to bring across the plain meaning of a passage in its historical context and thus falsifies the message."³¹

Spiritualizing

"Spiritualizing takes place when the preacher discards the earthly, physical, historical reality the text speaks about and crosses the gap with a spiritual analogy of that historical reality."³² David's killing of Goliath (1 Sam. 17) can be spiritualized to trust God in overcoming giant problems in life. For the sake of instant application, Goliath is spiritualized to mean "giant problems," like debt, disaster, illness, and marital strife, in the "battle of life." The spiritualized message becomes: As long as today's believers focus upon God, these life problems will tumble, but when they focus on the problems, they will stumble.³³ But this is not God's intent of the passage. Because Joshua failed to

³⁰ Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John: Books 10-16*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 258.

³¹ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 160

³² Ibid.

³³ Cf. book description on back of dust cover in Max Lucado, *Facing Your Giants* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2006).

drive out the Anakites, a race of giants (Josh. 11:22; 13:1-3) from Gath, David, claiming the promise of God (Deut. 7:1, 2, 16-24; 11:23-28, and Josh. 1:3), determined to finish the job and drive out those leftover giants. David demonstrated himself to be a better choice as the king of Israel because he aligned his heart with God and desired the full blessing of his promises. Hence, giants are those who oppose the fulfillment of God's promises. They are not problems of life.

Another example of spiritualization: Jesus' calming the storm (Matt. 9:23-27) can be interpreted to trust God to calm the storms in your life. Like allegorizing, spiritualizing fails to bear the weight of the text and is subjective and arbitrary in transferring only one or two elements of the text.³⁴

Parallelism

This error takes two forms. One is to understand a biblical situation and then parallel it to a corresponding situation in modern life. The other is to begin with a situation in modern life and find a corresponding situation in the Scripture.³⁵ For example, one can parallel the buffet offerings in a casino restaurant to the food offerings to idols (1 Cor. 8). Or, when a nurse is asked to assist in an abortion, she may rationalize her action by paralleling her situation with that of the Hebrew midwives (Exod. 1). Though this method seems simple and direct, it only works for limited passages. Because no two situations are identical, and there are far too many situations that have no biblical parallel, the method is inadequate to cover much of Scripture.

³⁴ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 161.

³⁵ Best, 65.

Identification

This method identifies with biblical characters and has modern listeners imitate or not imitate their attitudes and behaviors.³⁶ Preachers preach the character's attitude or behavior rather than the author's theological intent in the passage. In this way, Isaac exemplifies the patient and accepting man whom believers should emulate (Gen. 22, 26). Ruth exemplifies the daughter-in-law all married women should model themselves after. This method forces preachers to make a judgment about whether a particular action of a biblical character is good or bad. However, by what standard are these characters being judged? Identification assumes that these characters are timeless exemplars, and every believer must identify with some of them.³⁷ Greidanus critiques this approach:

. . . it simply ignores the gap by drawing a historical equation mark between then and now . . . we are Thomas, we are Mary, we are Peter . . . the forward movement of history and revelation is ignored, the literary context in which the Bible characters function is largely disregarded . . .³⁸

Moralizing

“Moralizing means drawing moral references, usually things to do or become.”³⁹ For example, the failure of Eli's sons (1 Sam. 2) becomes a lesson to parents to “discipline their children.” Thomas' absence behind closed doors (John 20) becomes

³⁶ This is arguably one of the most common methods preachers use in their sermons. Different writers call it different names: Ernest Best calls it identification; Howard F. Vos, the biographical method in *Effective Bible Study: A Guide to Sixteen Methods* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1956), 470; and Bryan Chapell, the “Be like” message in *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 281-2.

³⁷ Best, 90.

³⁸ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 162-3. For an extensive analysis and critique of this method, see Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Toronto, ON: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), 56-120.

³⁹ Leander E. Keck, *Bible in the Pulpit*, 101 as quoted in Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 163. Chapell calls this the “be good” message (*Christ-Centered Preaching*, 282).

an admonition, “Don’t miss the fellowship meeting.” This method applies the text without regard to the authorial intent. The subjective judgment and a passion to legitimize certain ethical practices of the preacher are the driving force behind this type of application.

Psychologizing

This method assumes that the Bible is a life manual which tells believers how to handle every trial that comes their way. For example, Jesus’ temptation (Matt. 4) becomes “overcome temptation by Scripture memorization.” Elijah’s flight to Horeb (1 King 19) becomes an antidote to depression: “Get enough food and rest.” This method of application implies believers are able to overcome life trials in their own strength.⁴⁰ All they have to do is to distill the how-to messages from the Scripture and adhere to them. This method neglects the author’s intent and inaccurately assumes psychological precedents in Scripture.

Authority Matters

Authorial Intent

Whatever method one uses to bridge the chasm between the biblical text and the contemporary audience reveals where true meaning and authority is seen to reside.⁴¹ Though a few of the above methods may be valid in bridging the chasm for a specific

⁴⁰ Chapell, 283-84.

⁴¹ French, 150. French summarized the seven schools of thought as to how and where meaning is to be found: in the author’s intention, in the text isolated from the author, in a reconstructed history behind the text, in a dialectic of progressive re-interpretations, in a personal revelation of God through the text, in a merging of the biblical and contemporary worlds, or in the subjective evaluation of the reader.

genre, all of them lack consistency, objectivity, control, and a method of validating. They minimally reflect God's purpose as expressed in the text. These methods either go directly to the text without much consideration of the discontinuities between the two worlds, or they draw in considerations outside the text, or they extrapolate beyond the text.⁴²

Expository preaching is about communicating and applying a biblical concept derived from a passage in its context.⁴³ As Motyer describes, it is "a display of what is there."⁴⁴ If it is not there in the text, it is not of God's authority. Warren wrote:

The biblical preacher claims that his authority rests in the text. . . . Preaching what is true, orthodox, relevant, or even biblical DOES NOT necessarily confer authority upon the preacher. Only when he preaches the **intent of the author/Author** (expressed in the Text) will his preaching carry Divine Authority.⁴⁵

The intent of the author/Author as expressed in the text is where the authority rests. This thesis and the seminar in chapter four adapt the position of Elliot Johnson: "The extent of the meaning intended is the meaning intended by the divine Author in the words of the text."⁴⁶

⁴² For a detailed analysis of these methods and how each of them contributes in a limited way to this bridging process, see Scro, 145-83. See also Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 166-67. Greidanus explains how these methods come short of reflecting God's purpose for the text.

⁴³ Refer to page 1 for Robinson's definition of expository preaching.

⁴⁴ J. Alex Motyer, foreword to Haddon Robinson, *Expository Preaching: Principles and Practice* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1980), vi.

⁴⁵ T. S. Warren, "An Authoritative Homiletic," 1. Capitalization and boldface are the author's.

⁴⁶ Elliot E. Johnson, "The Author's Role," 2nd draft, (unpublished class notes from 315 *Advanced Hermeneutics*, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, Fall 1981), 9.

Certainty of Authority

There are, at least, three levels of biblical meaning as they relate to the text: statement, implication and extrapolation. Statement is said meaning.⁴⁷ Implication is unsaid meaning.⁴⁸ And extrapolation is a further “unpacking of meaning.”⁴⁹ For example, “The command ‘Thou shalt not commit adultery’ is a statement. The sanctity of marriage is an implication drawn from the statement. By extrapolation one sees the condemnation of all sexual sins, as substantiated by the rest of the Scripture.”⁵⁰ Of the three levels, only statement and implication are authoritative and carry the authority of “thus says the Lord.” Extrapolation is subjective and does not carry the same authority.⁵¹

Preachers wish to apply the Scripture with the authority of “thus says the Lord” with all their applications. However, they cannot have that authority all the time. Preachers have to make the distinction between principle and application. The principle carries the authority of “thus says the Lord.” Usually, specific applications do not have the same authority.⁵² Some, after Hirsch, distinguish between meaning and

⁴⁷ Ramesh Richard, “Methodological Proposals for Scripture Relevance, Part 2: Levels of Biblical Meaning,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143: 570 (April-June 1986): 126.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 126-29.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 128-9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 129. Richard considers all three levels are meaning, not significance. Thus they all carry the authority of “thus says the Lord.” However, extrapolation is the question: “On the *basis* of what is written, what would the *author* have said if revelation were being given now in the 20th century?” How can preachers know for sure what the author would have said in the 21st century? Therefore, it is subjective and should not carry the same authority as in statement and implication.

⁵² For a more detailed explanation, see Haddon W. Robinson, “Blending Bible Content and Life Application,” in *Mastering Contemporary Preaching*, ed. B. Hybels, D. S. Briscoe, and H. W. Robinson (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1990), 55-65.

significance.⁵³ Others simply see it as a continuum of applicational authority,⁵⁴ ranging from intended meaning and most authoritative to extended meaning and less authoritative.

Theological Principlization

How then should preachers bridge this chasm and preserve the authority of “thus says the Lord?” How are preachers to reconcile the timely and timeless natures of the Bible? Theological principlization is a workable solution.

The Quest: Authoritative Application

Preachers are not authoritative in and of themselves. Their authority comes from the text that they are expounding and applying to the audience before them. To be faithful to the text and to accomplish the goal of expository preaching—a changed life—they pursue relevant and authoritative application. However, how should they bridge the chasm of discontinuities between the text and the contemporary audience while still retaining the authority of “thus says the Lord?” “What is it that carries or transmits the transcendent message of the text? What parts and aspects of the biblical presentation should and can be transferred into contemporary life?”⁵⁵

⁵³ E. D. Hirsch Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 57. Cf. Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 41, 337. Elliot Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 227-8.

⁵⁴ See quote on page 116. Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 25, 26. William Klein, “Evangelical Hermeneutics,” in *Initiation into Theology: The Rich Variety of Theology and Hermeneutics*, ed. Simon Maimela and Adrio Konig (Pretoria: JL van Schaik, 1998), 333, quoted in French, 147.

⁵⁵ French, 119.

Implications of Theological Principlization

Since the 1980's, several scholars have come up with different models in addressing this issue. Although they are different in terminology or emphases, their basic approaches, concepts, and theological reasonings are similar. Chapter three provides a summary of who they are and the models they advocate. What follows is a summary of this theological principlization process and the theology behind it.

The Text is Truth Applied

A biblical text is no longer considered *only* as locked in its own historical-cultural frame, but is also truth applied⁵⁶ to its specific historical-cultural frame. The biblical characters or original hearers, as they were addressed in the text, are seen as the initial recipients of the revelation and its claims.⁵⁷ How the biblical characters responded to the revelation in their historical-cultural time may lead preachers to the truth, the timeless principle that was given. For example, in Genesis 4:3-5, Cain and Abel brought offerings to God. They were applying the truth that was revealed to them. However, the passage is silent on what that truth was. Preachers and readers can only see that truth in its applied form. This is like watching and listening to a person responding to a telephone conversation and working back to what the other unseen and unheard side is saying. The side preachers have is the text detailing how the biblical characters responded to the truth, and the side they don't have is the truth being communicated.

⁵⁶ Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1990), 39.

⁵⁷ Carl G. Kromminga quoted by Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 166.

Theological Principles are Distilled from the Text

Since the principles are distilled from the text, preachers must discern the theological intention of the author/Author as expressed through the text. To do that, preachers need to know what the author intended to convey to his original audience.

What did he want from his audience? It is this authorial intent that gives authority to the principle, and thus to the application. That is the reason why a preacher's study:

. . . involves the quest for the big picture, or the overview, of biblical revelation. It is the nature of the biblical revelation that it tells a story rather than sets out timeless principles in abstract. It does contain many timeless principles, but not in abstract. They are given in a historical context of progressive revelation. If we allow the Bible to tell its own story, we find a coherent and meaningful whole. To understand this meaningful whole we have to allow the Bible to stand as it is; a remarkable complexity yet a brilliant unity, which tells the story of the creation and the saving plan of God.⁵⁸

Crossing over with the Theological Principle

With the timeless principle from the text, preachers can bridge across the chasm. When crossing the chasm, distinctions are to be made between transferring isolated elements of the text and transferring the message reflecting the author's theological intent.⁵⁹ For example, the principle distilled from "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," (Deut. 25:4) is "the one who works ought to benefit from his labor." New Testament authors cited this verse and applied the principle to several ministerial situations⁶⁰ (figure 2.1). However, if only the elements of the text are

⁵⁸ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 22.

⁵⁹ Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 167.

⁶⁰ See Matthew 10:10; Luke 10:6-7; 1 Corinthians 9:9; 1 Timothy 5:17-18. See also example 10 on pages 114-115 for a fuller explanation.

transferred, this will lead to the absurd application of “Do not lock the gas cap of a tractor while it is tilling the soil,” (figure 2.2) which totally misses the author’s intent.

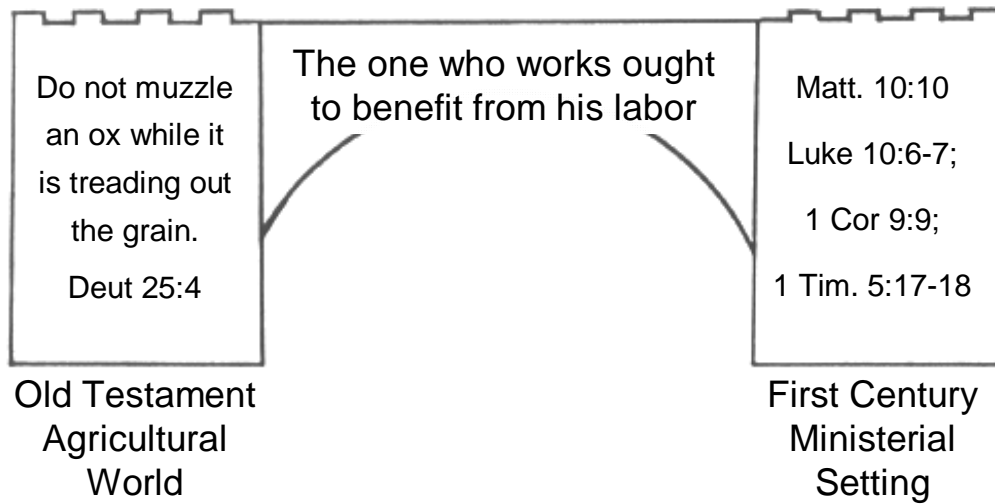


Figure 2.1 Transferring the Author's Message

Transferring Isolated Elements

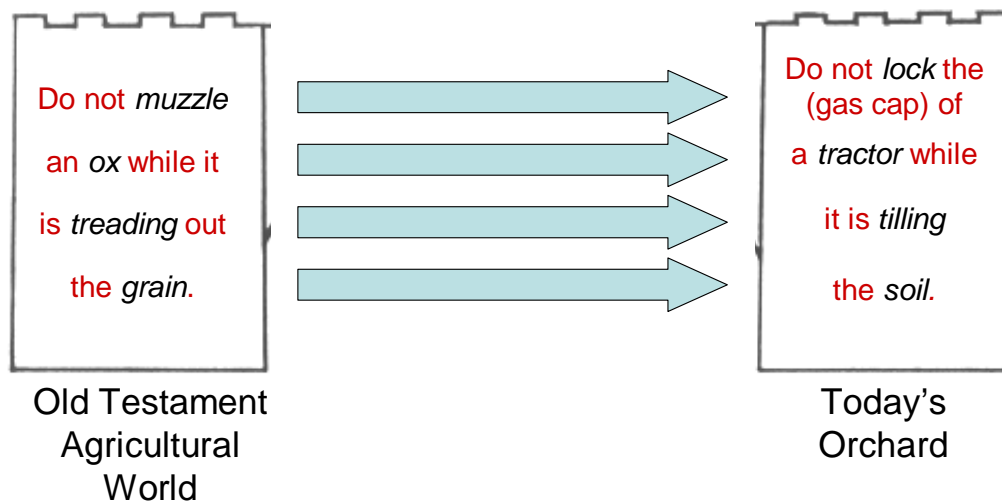


Figure 2.2 Transferring Isolated Elements

Only a limited number of scriptural passages can be applied directly without some degree of abstracting. Even in transferring the isolated elements in the last example, the Ladder of Abstraction is applied.⁶¹ What do “muzzle” and “lock” have in common? They both prevent things from entering. “Ox” and “tractor” both assist in agricultural work. “Treading” and “tilling” both refer to labor. “Grain” and “soil” are both on the ground. This further demonstrates the necessity of principlizing. The proper way to principlize is to honor the author’s theological intent and abstract the message, not the isolated elements.

Applying the Theological Principles to Current Situation

Today’s believers will be able to draw specific actions from a timeless principle. The more specific it is, the better it will be in accomplishing the purpose of the Scripture—a changed life.

Overarching Continuities between the Two Worlds

Though there are discontinuities, there exist overarching continuities between the two worlds that allow preachers to bridge the text with theological principles. These unchanging constants are (1) the nature of God, (2) the nature of man, and (3) the nature of salvation.⁶²

⁶¹ Chapter four provides further details on how to abstract a principle.

⁶² Richard, “Application Theory in Relation to the Old Testament,” 307-9. Different scholars identify these constants by different terms, but basically they are referring to the same overarching theological constants.

The Nature of God

The first unchanging constant that allows preachers to move from the meaning of a passage toward modern application is that both worlds were/are under the control of the same sovereign God. Kaiser writes:

All men and women in all cultures are made in the image of God. And when this fact is joined with a Biblical concept of truth as having an objective grounding and reference point in the nature of God and in the doctrine of creation, the possibility for adequate (even if no one knows comprehensively except God) transcultural communication has been fairly provided and secured.⁶³

God is immutable. His nature never changes. Any command appealing to His nature remains relevant today. For example, “Be holy, for I am holy,” (1 Pet. 1:16; Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7) is as valid today as it was when it was written. Since biblical case laws have their foundation in the Decalogue,⁶⁴ which is based on the moral and absolute character of God, the theological principles underlying them are timeless and have ethical authority in the lives of believers today.⁶⁵

God reveals Himself in the Scriptures. The Bible is about Him. It is not a self-help guide. “It is a story--a story about God in search of humankind and a story about God's progressive establishment of his kingdom on earth. And this overarching story is told through stories.”⁶⁶ “Even the epistles come to us in the very human form of

⁶³ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Meanings from God’s Message: Matters for Interpretation,” *Christianity Today* 22 (October 5, 1979): 1321.

⁶⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1983), 127-37.

⁶⁵ Cynthia Kay Hong, “A Theological and Hermeneutical Study of the Application of Selected Old Testament Case Laws to the Modern Church” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2003), 3.

⁶⁶ R. Paul Stevens, *Down-to-Earth Spirituality: Encountering God in the Ordinary, Boring Stuff of Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity 2003), 13-14.

letters from a concerned spiritual father to needy spiritual children.”⁶⁷ Preachers can look for the vision of God. What role of His is the text revealing? With an unchanging God, preachers can find continuities between the then and the now.

However, preachers should not allow this continuity to minimize the obvious discontinuity. Adjustments should be given to the differences in God’s administration.

Richard gives this example:

. . . the killing of Canaanites (Josh. 11:20) or the justified threat of punishment for opposing the poor (Amos 2:6-7) cannot be directly transferred to today for the simple reason that the church is not the Old Testament theocracy. . . . This keeps in mind both continuity and discontinuity.⁶⁸

The Nature of People

The second constant is the nature of people. Human nature has not changed over time and culture. Human needs--physical, psychological and spiritual--are the same throughout the ages. Everyone is born in sin (Psa. 51:5; 58:3; Eph. 2:3). All people are separated from God and cannot please God. All need God’s grace to come before Him. These universal characteristics of humanity serve a line of connection between the then and the now.

God uses the Scripture as His tool to equip people for the tasks He has for them. “*All* Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be *thoroughly equipped* for every good work.” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17) This passage implies that humanity is depraved and that God so designed the Bible to redeem them from their depravity. The word “correcting”

⁶⁷ A. Duane Litfin, *Public Speaking: A Handbook for Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 1981), 292.

⁶⁸ Richard, “Application Theory in Relation to the Old Testament,” 308.

is a word which literally means “restoring to an upright position or a right state.”⁶⁹ The word “thoroughly” conveys the idea of complete, capable, proficient-- able to meet all demands.⁷⁰ It is through the sanctifying work of God’s Word that man is restored from his inadequacy to complete righteousness in doing God’s work.

This is why preachers should and can look for the “depravity factor,”⁷¹ or “fallen condition focus (FCF)” from every passage. Chapell clarifies:

... the reason all Scripture has a Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) is so that it can expose God’s redemptive purposes for his people in order to magnify his glory The main reason to ask why the Holy Spirit inspired any text is in order for God’s glory to be properly recognized and honored. The FCF exposes the necessity of a divine solution to the human dilemma and necessarily makes God the hero of the text as he displays his redemptive provision for his people. God rescues his people from their broken nature and world by his grace alone in order for them to experience his goodness and express his glory.”⁷²

This means that every passage of Scripture is relevant to contemporary believers. They have these conditions in common with any biblical character: (1) they are sinners, and (2) they live in a sinful world.

Thus the full range of the Bible’s content—whether it be exhorting us to trust in God’s goodness, commanding us to flee sexual immorality, encouraging us to be good parents, exposing the deceitfulness of covetousness, comforting us with the promise of Christ’s return, or warning us that God is a consuming fire—is aimed

⁶⁹ Ralph Earle, “2 Timothy,” in vol 11 of *The Bible Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House), 410.

⁷⁰ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, “artius,” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed. rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 110.

⁷¹ Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 24.

⁷² Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 2nd ed. (2005), 14.

(in some fashion) at my needs *today* . . . as a sinner living in a sin-corrupted world.⁷³

The Nature of Salvation

The third constant is salvific continuity.⁷⁴ It consists of the covenantal relationships that join both of the above constants, God and people. God has always been committed to redeeming His fallen creation. Based on God's covenant fidelity,⁷⁵ His covenantal relationships remain in effect all the time. Preachers can assume "that God deals the same way with men and women in every age, which makes the transhistorical understanding and application of the message possible."⁷⁶

On the human side, accepting God's plan for salvation lets all men and women share in a "common experience of the mercy of God,"⁷⁷ binding them into his covenants, and sharing a future with Him. Those who reject His grace and mercy will be judged and have no hope in Christ. Richard summarizes:

The whole promise-fulfillment theme is an aspect of redemptive history. The themes of law and grace in both testaments testify to this constant theme. The eschatological hope promised in the Old Testament and reaffirmed and expanded in the New Testament is a significant aspect of redemptive history. Though people were saved under different stewardships, the source, basis, means, and object of salvation have always been the same.⁷⁸

⁷³ Robert G. Spinney, "How to Survive Your Pastor's Sermons: Six Ways to Make Pulpit Messages More Profitable to Your Soul" Grace Baptist Church, Hartsville, Tennessee, (n. d.), <http://www.hartsvillereformedbaptist.com/sermon.htm> (accessed November 2, 2006).

⁷⁴ Richard, "Application Theory in Relation to the Old Testament," 309.

⁷⁵ Richard L. Pratt, Jr., *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1993), 325.

⁷⁶ William Larkin, *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying the Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 100.

⁷⁷ Best, 54.

⁷⁸ Richard, "Application Theory in Relation to the Old Testament," 309.

Although many differences exist between the two worlds, continuities can be found. Preachers can principle the Scripture because of the nature of God, the nature of people, and the nature of salvation.

*New Testament Authors' Application of the Old Testament
Demonstrates Continuity*

There are ample examples in the Bible where one biblical author cites from another previous biblical text to apply to his audience. These further strengthen the continuity of the Scripture between different stages of kingdom history. The examples given below are Jesus' and Paul's uses of the Old Testament.⁷⁹

Jesus Principled the Scripture

Jesus in His earthly ministry not only affirmed the continuation of the Law (Matt. 5:17-19), He also applied the Old Testament Scripture numerous times.⁸⁰ He principled "You shall not murder" to "Do not be angry with each other or you will be judged," and He applied this principle to three specific situations of His listeners (Matt. 5:21-26; cf. Example 9 and figure 4.27 on pages 111-113 for a fuller treatment). On another occasion He even summarized the 613 individual rabbinical commandments of

⁷⁹ There are other biblical authors citing prior Scripture: (1) Old Testament authors citing the Old Testament authors, (2) New Testament authors citing the New Testament, and (3) other New Testament authors citing the Old Testament.

⁸⁰ For examples, Jesus applied the Old Testament Scripture in the Gospel of Matthew no less than twenty times (4:4, 7, 10; 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43; 9:13; 11:10; 12:7, 17-21; 13:14, 15, 35; 14:8; 19:5; 21:42; 22:32, 44; 26:31).

His day into two great commandments: love God, and love your neighbor (Matt. 22:38-40; Mark 12:30-32; Luke 10:26-28).⁸¹

Paul Principled the Scripture

Paul, the apostle, consistently applied the Old Testament Scripture to the New Testament believers. In 1 Corinthians 9:7-11, within the larger context of limiting Christian liberty for the benefit of others, Paul reasoned that he has the right to be supported by those to whom he ministers. In one of his arguments, he quoted, “Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading the grain (Deut. 25:4).” He argued that God’s intent of that case law was not limited to animals, but that it also applies to the relationship between him and the New Testament believers (1 Cor. 9:10). Paul is appealing to a theological principle: “The one who works ought to benefit from his labor.” Years later, Paul instructed Timothy to give double honor to the elders based on the same principle (1 Tim. 5:17-18).⁸²

In 1 Corinthians 10, after summarizing the history and events in Exodus (vv. 1-4), Paul tells the New Testament believers that these Old Testament events serve as analogies (vv. 6, 11) for their instruction.⁸³ There are many other case laws and references to the Decalogue used by Paul in the New Testament.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Kuhatschek, 52-54. See also pages 96-98 for a fuller explanation.

⁸² See also Example 10, pages 114-115.

⁸³ For more examples, see Examples 2, 4, and 9 and Figure 4.18 in Chapter Four on pages 80, 82-84, 112-114, and 98 respectively.

⁸⁴ Case Laws used in New Testament include: Leviticus 19:5 in Romans 10:5; Leviticus 19:18 in Galatians 5:14; Leviticus 26:11-12 in 2 Corinthians 6:16; Deuteronomy 19:15 in 2 Corinthians 13:1; and Deuteronomy 21:23 in Galatians 3:13. References to the Decalogue in the New Testament include: Exodus 20:17 in Romans 7:7; Deuteronomy 5:16 in Ephesians 6:2-3; and Deuteronomy 5:17-21 in Romans 13:9.

That Jesus and Paul principiized the Old Testament to New Testament believers demonstrates that principiization is a valid method in applying the Scripture. In like manner, preachers can bring the biblical text to the modern listeners through principiization.

Conclusion

This chapter affirms the timely and timeless nature of the Bible and the existence of discontinuities and continuities between the biblical and modern worlds. The need to bridge the historical-cultural chasm and current inadequate methods of bridging were briefly examined. Since authority comes from the text, preachers must honor the author's intent through theological principiization. This method is based on the continuities between the two worlds: (1) the nature of God, (2) the nature of people, and (3) the nature of salvation. That both Jesus and Paul principiized the Old Testament Scripture further affirm the validity of this approach. Chapter four will demonstrate how this process of theological principiization works.

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Though much has been written in the area of hermeneutics, little has been written about application in books prior to 1980.¹ To this researcher's knowledge, not a single volume was dedicated to the subject of application per se before 1980, let alone on the subject and process of theological principlization. There have been isolated articles here and there related to the process in theological journals and early development of the idea among a few preaching texts. In fact, standard hermeneutic and how-to-study-the-Bible texts from that period have only one or two chapters, at most, that are devoted to the topic of application.

After 1980, more attention has been given to the subject of application. Individual volumes dedicated to the subject have been published.² Hermeneutic texts and how-to-study-the-Bible books are dedicating a section,³ rather than a chapter or two, to

¹ In his book, *Biblical Preaching*, first published in 1980, Robinson acknowledged there was no book published that is devoted exclusively to application. See Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 89. As Jack Kuhatschek wrote, "If we turn to the standard books on Bible study, we are given little help with the often thorny problems of application. . . . Many books on hermeneutics (principles of interpretation) devote hundreds of pages to interpreting the Bible but spend only five or ten on how to apply it." Kuhatschek, 8.

² See Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching*; Walter Henrichsen and Gayle Jackson, *A Layman's Guide to Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985); and Kuhatschek, *Taking the Guesswork Out of Applying the Bible*.

³ See Hendricks and Hendricks, *Living by the Book* has seven chapters on "application." Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982). carries a heavy portion on application.

the topic. Different authors have articulated the issues in bridging the gaps between the text and the sermon, recognizing the need of some objective guide to link them from exegesis to sermon application.⁴

In the 1990's, there were more discussions in the area of theological principlization, but they were still rare.⁵ Even at this stage, in reference to the scarcity of pertinent literature, Timothy S. Warren, professor of the Pastoral Department of Dallas Theological Seminary, commented: "There is very little material available on how to make this [theological principlization] crucial move in the expositional process."⁶

Organization of the Works

The works selected are limited to those covering the process of theological principlization. In hermeneutical and homiletical works that have a section on principlization, only that section is evaluated. The works are arranged into three categories: (1) pre-game players, (2) major players, (3) minor players and (4) players of another game. Then within each category, they are listed according to the year that they were published.

⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 18. Rob Barrett, "Models for a Theology of Biblical Application." (paper presented in the THEO 500 *Theological Overview* class at Regent College, Vancouver, B.C., April 17, 2001).

⁵ In October, 1998 in a personal memo replying to my question, Don Sunukjian, homiletics professor of Talbot Theological Seminary, did not know of any articles that give a fair treatment of the ladder of abstraction from a biblical application context.

⁶ Quoted from a personal e-mail from Timothy S. Warren sent to me on September 21, 2006.

Pre-game Players

The first two books are neither hermeneutical nor homiletical. However, they are books that utilized some aspects of theological principlization while hermeneutical and homiletical books during this period were relatively silent about the subject. They are here to illustrate the early stages of some aspects in this theological principlization process. Both authors formulated their propositions in their respective fields though they did so without articulating the process explicitly.

Gene A. Getz (1974)

Sharpening the Focus of the Church. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974.

The book outlines the principles of church renewal. Getz inductively studied the first century church through three lenses: Scripture, history, and culture. He concluded that while the Bible gives us considerable information on function (i.e., teaching), it is relatively silent on form (how and where we teach). While writing the book, he launched his first Fellowship Church in 1972. Its vision was to provide three vital experiences that Christians need in order to grow spiritually: Bible teaching, fellowship, and outreach. Committed to biblical absolutes and “freedom in form,” the church is allowed to develop these three experiences creatively.⁷ As a result, a movement was born. Twelve Fellowship Churches have been started in the Dallas metroplex, and numerous churches attribute their roots back to what has happened in Dallas.

⁷ “Dr. Gene A. Getz.” (Dallas, TX: Renewal Radio, n.d.), <http://renew.foln.org/Staff/Gene> (accessed September 17, 2006).

Getz's contribution to the process is that he was among the first who employed a process of theological principalization in applying the Scriptures in the area of church growth. He provided a solid and proven product for utilizing the process of theological process in church renewal. His historical and cultural lenses serve as a technique of "distilling" the principles (functions) from the texts (forms). Indeed, he has demonstrated the value of principizing the text through what he envisioned as separating the forms and functions of scriptural ideas. See figure 3.1.

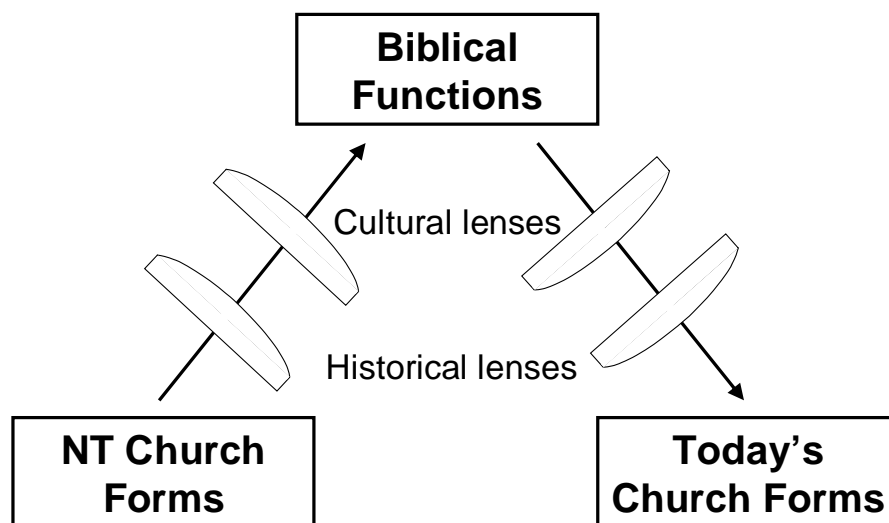


Figure 3.1 Getz's Model

H. Edward Everding, Jr. and Dana W. Wilbanks (1975)

Decision Making and the Bible. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1975.

The authors advocate a responsive style of decision making. The response style has three components: Bible \longleftrightarrow Self \longleftrightarrow Situation. The four ingredients of the

response style⁸ are: (1) centrality of faith, (2) images of God and human responsibility, (3) communal context, and (4) concrete response.

Their contribution to the process of theological principlization is that application is an interactive process between three different components. It is not a one-way linear process. Instead, their four “ingredients” guide the process along the way. It takes into account who the audience is and their present situation. Everding and Wilbanks view the Bible as “mirrors and windows” rather than a manual of life’s issues.⁹ “The call to faith does not come primarily as rules or ideals but as vivid images of human actions that are faithful to God. The interaction between God and human beings in history is the primary drama of the biblical tradition.”¹⁰

Extra helpful is their chapter five “Images of God and Human Responsibility,” which Robinson applied to the homiletical context in what he calls the “vision of God.” He asks four questions:

First, what is the vision of God in this particular text?
 Second, where precisely do I find that in the passage? (The vision of God is always in the specific words and the life situation of the writer or the readers.)
 Third, what is the function of this vision of God? What implications for belief or behavior did the author draw from the image?
 Fourth, what is the significance of that picture of God for me and for others?¹¹

⁸ H. Edward Everding and Dana W. Wilbanks, *Decision Making and the Bible* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press), 37-38; 46-47; 53-130.

⁹ Ibid., 49.

¹⁰ Ibid., 79.

¹¹ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (2001), 94.

Major Players

There are major and minor players in this quest of theological principlization. The works chosen below in some ways subscribe, contribute, or are compatible with the process of theological principlization. Though each may emphasize a certain feature of the process, their basic structural model is the same. In the hermeneutical and homiletical works listed, only the portions related to principlization are reviewed.

Since there is no unified terminology,¹² each work is evaluated against the basic three-component structure of the theological principlization process: (1) the biblical text (biblical world), (2) the theological principle, and (3) the contemporary audience (modern world) as shown in figure 3.2.

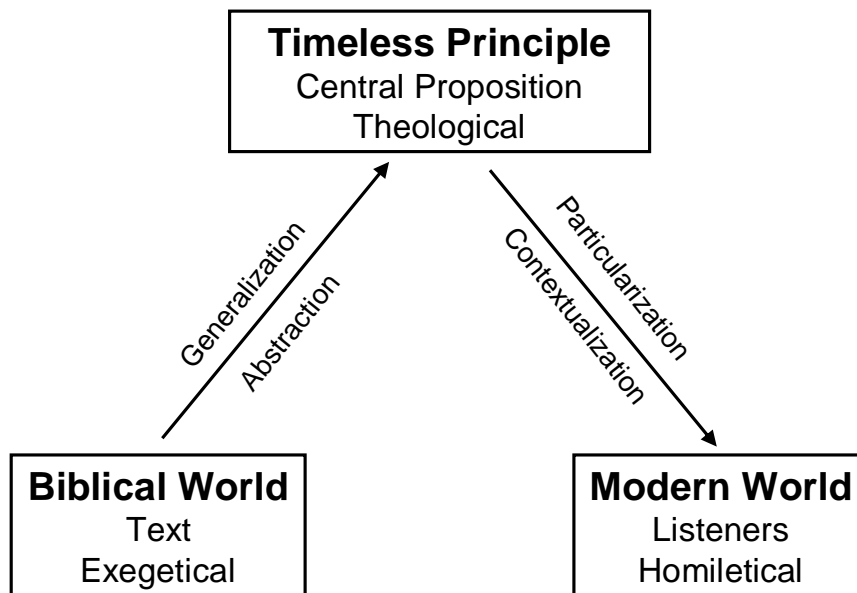


Figure 3.2 Basic Principlization Model

¹² They use different terminologies to refer to similar concepts or sometimes different concepts with the same terminology.

All works are listed according to the year that they were published. When an author has several works which he has published, he will be listed according to the year of his most influential work as it relates to the process. Listing the works in this order gives a chronological sense of development and makes it easier to follow their similarities and differences.

Major players are the forerunners of the principlization process. They are the developers, philosophers, and “methodists” of the process. Most of them developed their models without much help from prior literature which, at best, was scarce. Nor did they have the benefit of knowing what the others were developing.¹³

Bernard Ramm (1970)

Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970.

Ramm laid some seed thoughts about the use of principles in application. He sees “the Bible is more a book of principles than a catalogue of specific directions.”¹⁴ He understands that “commands in terms of one culture must be translated into our culture.”¹⁵ In his definition of principlizing, he limits principles to those that can be deducted from the text.

To principlize is to discover in any narrative the basic spiritual, moral, or theological principles. These principles are latent in the text and it is the process

¹³ Based on the years of their publication and their self-acknowledgement of (1) no or little existing literature on the subject, and (2) not being aware of any others pursuing something similar.

¹⁴ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), 186.

¹⁵ Ibid., 189.

of deduction which brings them to the surface. It is not an imposition on the text.¹⁶

Ramm does not present any model of application, but he hints at the idea of principlization according to the text.¹⁷

Henry A. Virkler (1981)

Hermeneutics: Principles and Process of Biblical Interpretation. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981.

While Ramm referred to the principlization process in only a few paragraphs, Virkler devoted a full chapter to the concept, expanding the technique of principlization and illustrating it with examples. Though he ties a valid principle to the author's intent,¹⁸ Virkler's principlization process comes short of producing universal timeless principles. That's why he recognizes the need of further discernment to determine whether the principles are transcultural or culture-bound, and normative or non-normative.¹⁹ Virkler's technique of principlization does not abstract high enough to produce timeless, transcultural, and normative principles which this thesis has defined.

Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart (1982)

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982.

How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003.

¹⁶ Ibid., 200.

¹⁷ E. Johnson points out the inadequacies of Ramm's deriving his principles from deduction. See *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 230-33.

¹⁸ Henry A. Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 221.

¹⁹ Ibid., 220-23.

Fee and Stuart affirm the importance of proper interpretation according to the author's intent with consideration of the historical context and literary forms. For example, because epistles are occasional documents, they require special applicational methods to arrive at timeless principles.²⁰ Once these principles are derived, they are applicable to genuinely compatible situations only. To illustrate this, the authors give the following example:

Paul forbids participation in the temple meals on the basis of the stumbling-block principle. But note that this does not refer to something that merely offends another believer. The stumbling-block principle refers to something one believer feels he can do in good conscience, and which, by his action or persuasion, he induces another believer to do, who cannot do so in good conscience. After all, the brother or sister is "destroyed" by emulating another's action; he or she is not merely offended by it. The principle would seem to apply, therefore, only to truly comparable situations.²¹

J. Robertson McQuilkin (1983)

Understanding and Applying the Bible. Chicago: Moody Press, 1983, rev. 1992.

"Limits of Cultural Interpretation." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23: 2 (June 1980): 113-24.

"Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent." *In Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984, 219-40.

²⁰ Fee and Stuart, (1982), 67.

²¹ Ibid., 63; Cf. Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," 23; Samuel L. Harbin, "A Model for Theologically Validating Contemporary Applications from Old Testament Narratives: A Literary Foundation," (D.Min. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001), 128-30. What Robinson refers to as the "center of the analogy" and Harbin refers to as "critical components" are essential elements that make the text unique. These elements dictate whether the principles are applicable in a particular situation. The tension has been whether to spell out these essential elements/conditions in the timeless principle proposition, or let them remain as necessary conditions before applying the text. In placing these essential elements onto the timeless principles, they make the principles clumsy and not easy to understand without further explanation. But if these essential elements stay on the situation level, the principles run the risk of applying in a non-compatible situation. See also "Concise vs. Precise Principle" on pages 142 and 143.

McQuilkin acknowledges the two worlds (the biblical and the modern) with two processes (interpretation and application) and a general principle between them.²² His basic premise is that “every teaching in Scripture is universal unless Scripture itself treats it as limited.”²³ He also believes that “the task of the interpreter is to set the teaching free from its cultural bondage to determine a universal truth or principle.”²⁴ He has six hermeneutical questions to help preachers recognize those universal principles: (1) does the context limit the recipient or application? (2) does subsequent revelation limit the recipient or the application? (3) is this specific teaching in conflict with other biblical teaching? (4) is the reason for a norm given in Scripture and is that reason treated as normative? (5) is the specific teaching normative as well as the principle behind it? and, (6) does the Bible treat the historic context as normative?²⁵

According to McQuilkin, “God reveals His will in two ways through Scripture: explicit declaration and generic principle.”²⁶ Four sources of biblical principles are those that are: (1) explicitly stated; (2) derived from explicit declaration; (3) derived from historical passages; and (4) derived from the author’s intent.²⁷ Principles derived from the historical passages have three levels of authority: (1) those that were given the reason; (2) those that were commended or condemned biblically; and (3) those that can only be

²² J. Robertson McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 52-53.

²³ J. Robertson McQuilkin, “Problems of Normativeness in Scripture: Cultural Versus Permanent,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984) 230.

²⁴ McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 247.

²⁵ McQuilkin, “Problems of Normativeness in Scripture,” 230-40.

²⁶ McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 256.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 258-63.

used to illustrate truth clearly taught elsewhere in the Scripture. All in all, McQuilkin's model is represented in figure 3.3.

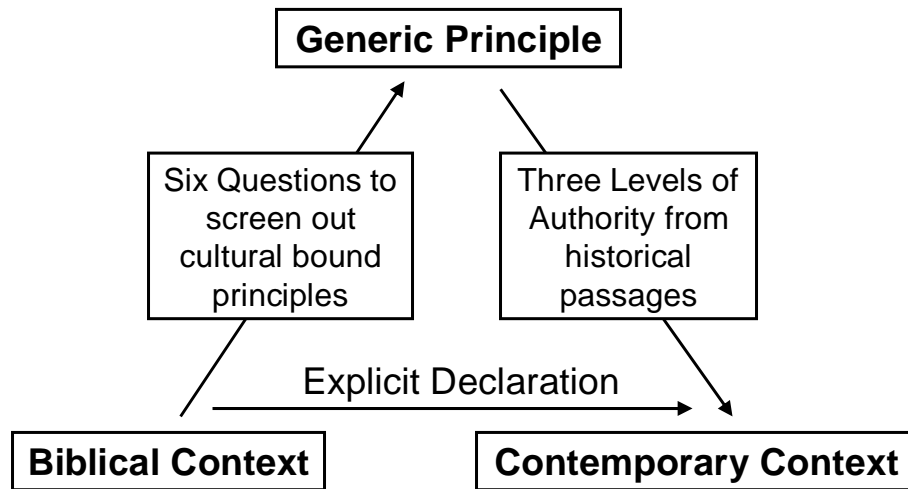


Figure 3.3 McQuilkin's Model

Harold Freeman (1985, 1987)

"Making the Sermon Matter: The Use of Application in the Sermon." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 27: 2 (Spring 1985): 32-37.

Variety in Biblical Preaching: Innovative Techniques and Fresh Forms. (Waco: Word Books Publisher, 1987), 25-30, 39-45.

Freeman argues that the preaching in the synagogue during the intertestamental period and during the early church demonstrates that a preaching arc exists. (26-8). He asserts the essential preaching process is to deal with the "then of the text" and "the now of our time."²⁸ In his chapter three, "Managing the Middle," he offers six steps to managing the middle responsibly. The first three steps on the "textual side" are: (1) eternalize: what in this text is always true? (2) universalize: what in this text is

²⁸ Freeman, *Variety in Biblical Preaching*, 28.

true for all people? and (3) principiize: is there a principle behind the particular statement of the text? These steps move from the specific to the general. The next three steps on the “life side” are: (1) contemporize: what in this text is true now? (2) personalize: what in this text is true for you? and (3) particularize: how does the principle apply to particular situations now? They move from the general to the specific. Each step correlates with the steps on the “textual side” of the message.²⁹ See figure 3.4. Freeman strongly emphasizes adherence to the text throughout the process. He could well be the first who sliced the principlization process into smaller steps of abstraction.

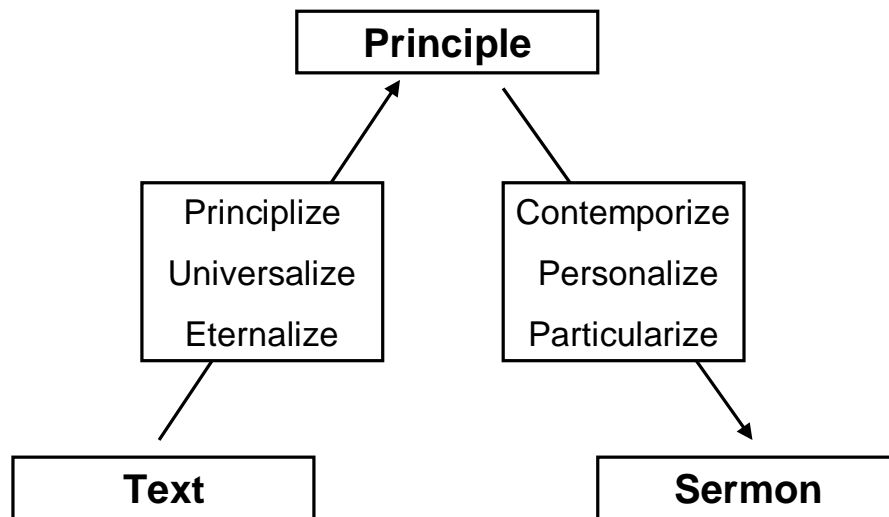


Figure 3.4 Freeman's Model

Ramesh P. Richard (1986)

“Methodological Proposals for Scripture Relevance, Part 1: Selected Issues in Theoretical Hermeneutics.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143: 569 (January-March 1986): 14-25.

“Methodological Proposals for Scripture Relevance, Part 2: Levels of Biblical Meaning.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143: 570 (April-June 1986): 123-33.

²⁹ Ibid., 42.

“Methodological Proposals for Scripture Relevance, Part 3: Application Theory in Relation to the New Testament.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143: 571 (July-September 1986): 205-17.

“Methodological Proposals for Scripture Relevance, Part 4: Application Theory in Relation to the Old Testament.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143: 572 (October-December 1986): 302-13.

Scripture Sculpture: A Do-It-Yourself Manual for Biblical Preaching. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995.

Richard introduces three levels of meaning, thus application, that carry different degrees of authority: (1) statement, (2) implication, and (3) extrapolation. In bridging the chasm, preachers do not have to abstract up if it is not necessary. “Since many implications can be derived from Scripture, they must first be probed for application and response. However, if ‘implication’ is not adequate, extrapolative elements enter into hermeneutics.”³⁰ See figure 3.5.

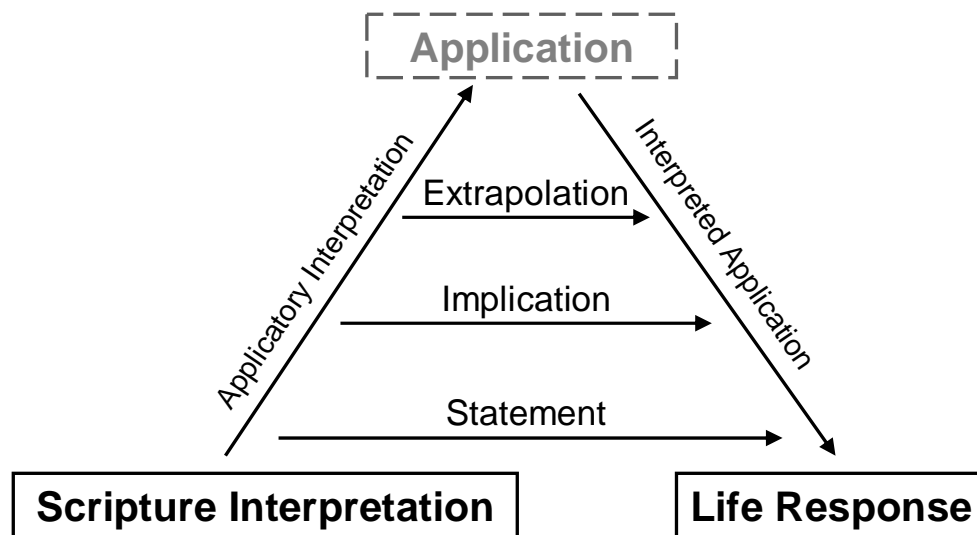


Figure 3.5 Richard's Model

³⁰ Richard, "Levels of Biblical Meaning," 129.

Before Richard, scholars had taken the discontinuities between the two worlds for granted and spent much of their efforts in deriving the principles that bridge the chasm. Richard took a serious look at these discontinuities and offered “an approach that preserves continuities and yet is more realistic about discontinuities.”³¹ He noted similarities and differences between the two audiences: (1) who they are (audience-reference), and (2) what they are like (audience traits).³² He also identified the three trans-temporal, interdispensational constants that bridge the two worlds: (1) the nature of God, (2) the nature of man, and (3) the nature of salvation.³³

Richard in his later work, *Scripture Sculpture*,³⁴ offers a seven-step sermon preparation process.³⁵ He distinguishes between the “Central Proposition of the Text” (CPT) and the “Central Proposition of the Sermon” (CPS), and that between them is the purpose bridge. Other than mentioning that both the CPT and CPS have to be compatible, Richard says little in how to bridge the CPT to the CPS. In his appendix, Richard describes principlization as “the theory of preaching that takes a passage, extracts a

³¹ Harbin, 123.

³² Ramesh Richard, “Methodological Proposals for Scripture Relevance, Part 3: Application Theory in Relation to the New Testament,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143: 571 (July-September 1986): 207-09.

³³ Richard, “Application Theory in Relation to the Old Testament,” 308-10.

³⁴ The book title was later changed to *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching*.

³⁵ This list-in-reverse is the way Richard formats the steps to show what the foundational elements are: (7) Preach the Sermon “Flesh;” (6) Structure the Sermon “Skeleton;” (5) The Central Proposition of the Sermon (CPS) “Heart;” (4) The Purpose Bridge “Brain;” (3) The Central Proposition of the Text (CPT) “Heart;” (2) Structure the Text “Skeleton;” (1) Study the Text “Flesh.” Note the parallel to steps 1&7, 2&6, 3&5. Step 4 is the bridge or brain that helps us make the transition from text to sermon.

universal principle, and applies it to the contemporary context.”³⁶ He gives eleven difficulties (warnings) with this abstracting method of preaching.³⁷

Walter Kaiser (1987)

Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987.

Toward an Exegetical Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981.

“Inner Biblical Exegesis as a Model for Bridging the ‘Then’ and ‘Now’ Gap: Hosea 12:1-6.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28: 1 (March 1985): 33-46.

“New Approaches to Old Testament Ethics.” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 35: 3 (September 1992): 289-97.

During a time when the new hermeneutics fused them, Kaiser recognized that interpretation and application are two separate processes. Interpretation “is controlled by the text’s set of linguistic symbols and is fixed, single and unchanging,”³⁸ and application is “to name the relevance or a particularization of the discovered universal or principle in the text.”³⁹

He employed the ladder of abstraction to get to the “middle axioms.” This Ladder of Abstraction moves up from the particularities of a passage to the generality of a “middle axiom” and then back down to the particularities of applying the universal principles to the contemporary audience. These “middle axioms” or general principles must observe the theology and morality that undergirds the passage. He is against

³⁶ Richard, *Scripture Sculpture*, 163-67.

³⁷ See chapter four, footnote #62 for the eleven warnings.

³⁸ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Inner Biblical Exegesis as a Model for Bridging the ‘Then’ and ‘Now’ Gap: Hosea 12:1-6,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28: 1 (March 1985): 34.

³⁹ Ibid.

imposing a theological grid onto the texts but is for discovering the theological “subject” and “emphasis” of the text. Preachers can discover this theology or morality from (1) the reason given in the near context, (2) by observing citations, allusions or references to earlier history or teaching, (3) by using analogy with similar texts where the theology is much clearer, or (4) by using the principle of legitimate inference or implications.⁴⁰ See figure 3.6. Kaiser affirms the continuity of the Old Testament (Bible) and believes it still holds moral authority to today’s believers.⁴¹

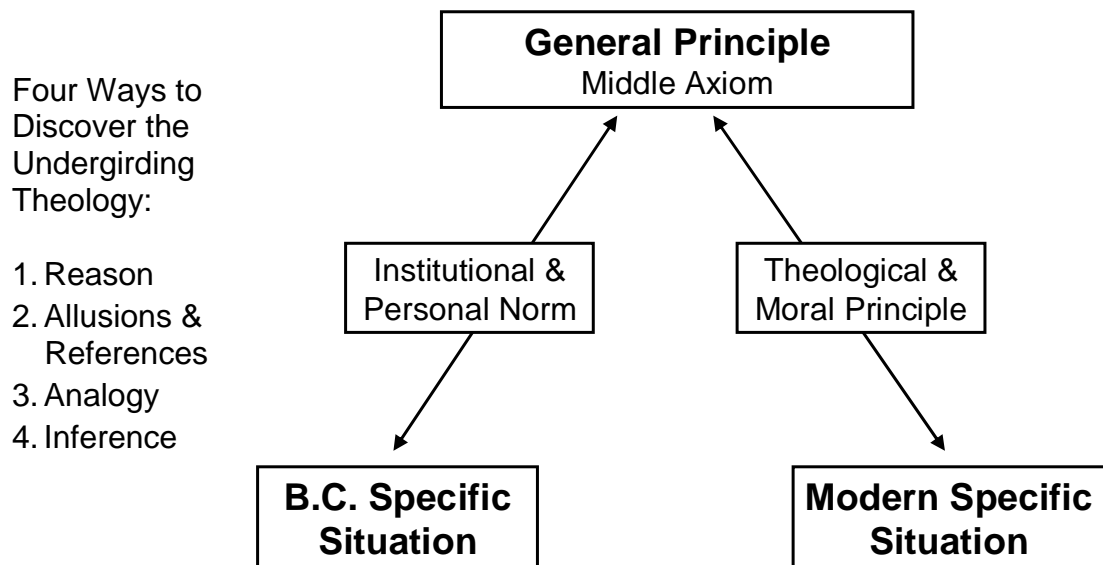


Figure 3.6 Kaiser's Model

⁴⁰ Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*, 159.

⁴¹ Based on Kaiser's works, Hong wrote "A Theological and Hermeneutical Study of the Application of Selected Old Testament Case Laws to the Modern Church," expanding on Kaiser's proposal. She demonstrates the validity of Old Testament case laws in today's society using three applicational models: (1) Kaiser's "middle axioms" and the "ladder of abstraction, (2) Wright's triangle model, and (3) Webb's redemptive-movement.

Sidney Greidanus (1988):

The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988.

Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts. Toronto, ON: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979.

“Application in Preaching Old Testament Texts.” In *Reading and Hearing the Word*, ed. Arie C. Leder, 233-44. Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary and CRC Publications, 1998.

Greidanus recognizes the need of properly bridging the gap. By that he means understanding what the author intended to convey to his original hearers/readers, discovering the underlying principle, then transferring the theme of the text, and not the isolated elements, across to the modern world. He identifies three discontinuities (progressive revelation, kingdom history, and culture), and two overarching continuities (one faithful God and one covenant people) between the two worlds.⁴² See figure 3.7.

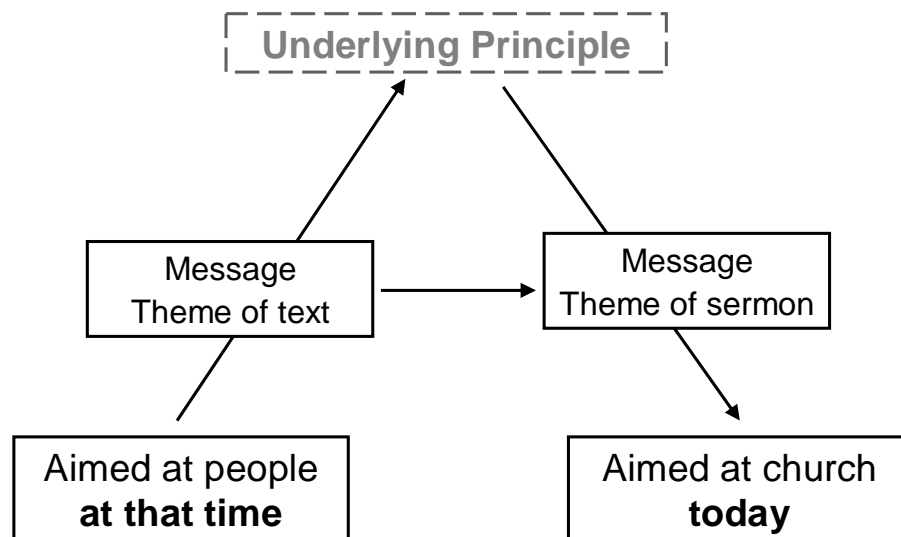


Figure 3.7 Greidanus' Model

⁴² Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 166-73.

Thomas G. Long (1989)

Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989.

The Witness of Preaching, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989.

Long added two insightful chapters to the process of moving from the text to the sermon in his book, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*. He encourages preachers not only to investigate the historical background, but also the literary form and rhetorical aspect of the text. Preachers need to be sensitive to the genre of the text and cannot mold every genre of the Bible into one homiletical model.

In understanding the genre, Long asks the following questions:

1. What is the genre of the text?
2. What is the rhetorical function of this genre?
3. What literary devices does this genre employ to achieve its rhetorical effect?
4. How in particular does the text under consideration, in its own literary setting, embody the characteristics and dynamics described in questions 1-3?
5. How may the sermon, in a new setting, say and do what the text says and does in its setting?⁴³

The last question is particularly helpful in the process of theological principization because it forces preachers to form sermons that are expository not only in terms of the text's propositional content, but also in terms of its functional shape and application.

In his last chapter, Long discusses four perspectives for a hermeneutical bridge between exegesis and sermon: (1) allow the movement of the sermon to follow the movement of the text; (2) allow the opposing forces in the text to become the opposing forces in the sermon; (3) allow the central insight of the text to be the central insight of

⁴³ Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 24.

the sermon. (4) allow the mood of the text to set the mood of the sermon.⁴⁴ These can serve as literary continuities between the text and the sermon.

Long summarized his book well:

This book is about biblical preaching, and it is based upon the relatively simple idea that the literary form and dynamics of a biblical text can and should be important factors in the preacher's navigation of the distance between text and sermon. Preachers who have sought to be open and attentive to biblical texts in their preaching have long sensed that a sermon based upon a psalm, for example, ought somehow to be different from one that grows out of a miracle story, not only because of what the two texts say but also because of how the texts say what they say. A psalm is poetry, a miracle story is narrative; and because they are two distinct literary and rhetorical forms, they "come at" the reader in different ways and create contrasting effects. What is needed, then, is a process of sermon development sufficiently nuanced to recognize and employ these differences in the creation of the sermon itself.⁴⁵

Though Long's main concerns are sermon forms, his contributions to the process moving from the text to the sermon application are: (1) he recognized the necessity of bridging both the idea and the intention of a given text in the theological principization process--"The preacher should bring to the sermon both what the text says (focus) and what the text does (function),"⁴⁶ and (2) he gave preachers another important tool--literary form analysis--to determine the meaning of the text and especially what its effect was on the original audience. To Long, faithful application "is not to replicate the text but to regenerate the impact of some portion of that text [T]he preacher should

⁴⁴ Ibid., 128-35.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁶ Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 84-5.

attempt to say and do what a portion of the text now says and does for a new and unique set of people.”⁴⁷ See figure 3.8.

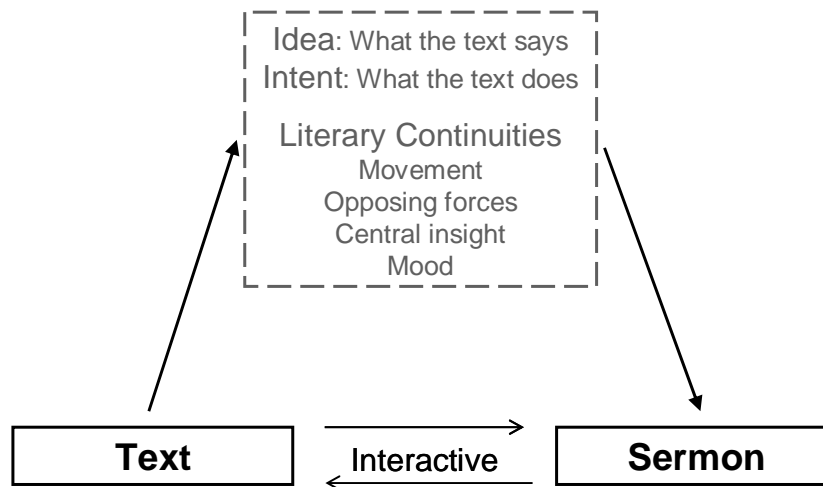


Figure 3.8 Long's Model

Long believes in the interactive approach between the reader and the text throughout the process. He disputes the misconception that the process “involves a series of unilateral moves: from determining the meaning of the text to deciding how to apply the meaning to the contemporary situation in the sermon.”⁴⁸ While the text, according to Long, dominates the process of interpretation, application erupts in the interaction between the text and the current reader. For this reason, “preaching involves a contemporary interpreter closely attending a text, discerning the claim that text makes

⁴⁷ Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, 33.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 34.

upon the current life of the community of faith, and announcing that discovery in the sermon.”⁴⁹

Long’s non-evangelical view of Scripture leads him astray in applications that are faithful to the authorial intent. He fails to reckon the soteriological- historical direction of the Old Testament pointing to the cross. For example, he moralized the story of Ruth into “an opportunity to forge a connection between the church and Boaz,” using it to challenge Christians: “Beyond the walls of every church lie a neighborhood and a world--a Ruth, if you will--saying, you are the next of kin. Fulfill the Law.”⁵⁰

Jay Adams (1990)

Truth Applied: Application in Preaching. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990.

To Adams, the ultimate purpose of the Bible and of preaching is life changes. The text is truth applied. Telic analysis of the text is the effort to “uncover the purpose of the passage: what the Holy Spirit intends to do to the listener from it. Then, building the sermon on that. . . .”⁵¹ “Preaching is truth applied. . . . Given in applied form, God’s truth should be preached in an applied form.”⁵² It is the preacher’s task to abstract to the principle and learn how God has already applied it. Then he must apply the principle in his own context exactly as God applied it when first revealing the truth.⁵³

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 82-86.

⁵¹ Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching*, 38.

⁵² Ibid., 39.

⁵³ Ibid., 48.

In bridging the gap . . . look for the original intent, the *telos* of the passage, and abstract that in terms of a principle. Then find what is common to both the biblical and the contemporary situations.⁵⁴

The applicatory similarities are found both in the *telos* of the passage and in the *telos* of the message and in the elements in the situations (then and now) to which the passage applies.⁵⁵ See figure 3.9.

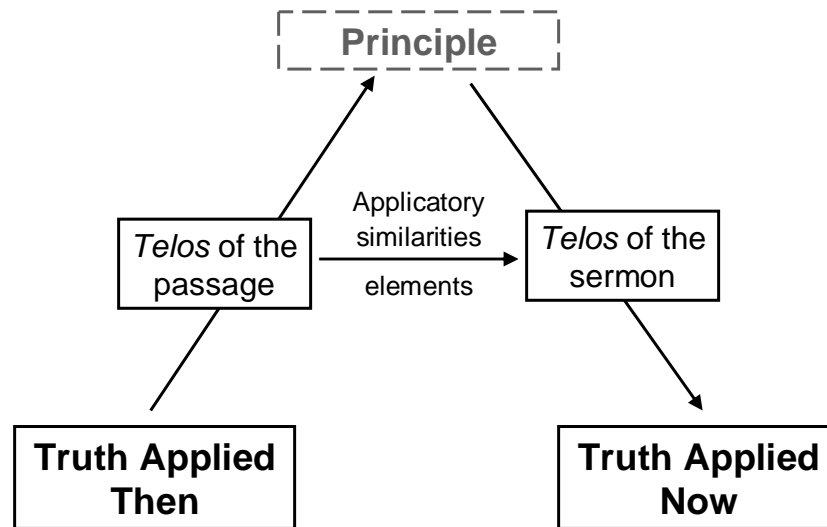


Figure 3.9 Adams' Model

Jack Kuhatschek (1990)

Taking the Guesswork Out of Applying the Bible. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990

Kuhatschek wrote an excellent non-scholarly book on applying the Bible. It is easy to read and filled with concrete examples. He outlined a three-step approach to application: (1) understand the original situation, (2) find general principles, and (3) apply the general principles to today. Then he demonstrated this approach to three types of genres: (1) biblical commands, (2) biblical examples, and (3) biblical promises. He

⁵⁴ Ibid., 49-50.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 49.

identified different levels of application and offered a way to abstract a concrete biblical situation from general principle to the reason behind the situation, and then up to the character of God.⁵⁶ To Kuhatschek, assuming a godly worldview is important for the process. “We want to grasp not only what God said but also why he said it. Our passion is to develop a godly mindset, a world view that is shaped by the broad scope of Scripture.”⁵⁷ See figure 3.10.

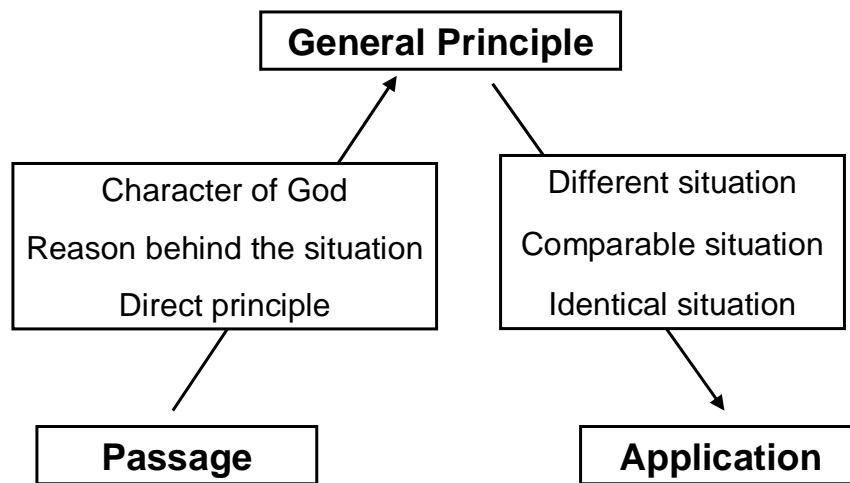


Figure 3.10 Kuhatschek's Model.

Elliott E. Johnson (1990)

Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990.

Johnson believes “the foundation for authoritative application must be an accurate and valid understanding of the author’s intended meaning.”⁵⁸ He sees the

⁵⁶ Kuhatschek, 58-61.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 62.

⁵⁸ E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 226.

intention of the Author/author as expressed through the text as the basic guideline for any principle.⁵⁹ He objects to using theology, culture, deduction, or induction to generalize these principles. Though a principle “refers to any generalization that provides a basis for reasoning or a guide for conduct or procedure,”⁶⁰ it:

... is stated with the degree of generality allowed by the type of message, which includes the theology of God’s purposes and administration. It is also stated with the degree of particularity needed in the situation of the interpreter.⁶¹

To Johnson, the Author/author’s intent and the audience are the major determinate factors in application. The human author’s intent will never contradict the divine author’s intent though the human author may not have been fully aware of what he wrote.⁶²

Johnson’s strong emphasis on authorial intent distinguishes him among the scholars. He highlights the importance of recognizing the progressive nature of biblical revelation when attempting to arrive at sound, contemporary applications of truth. “Theology in which God works repeatedly according to comparable and progressively fulfilling purposes, determines the application of the whole Bible.”⁶³ See figure 3.11.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 237.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 230.

⁶¹ Ibid., 236-37.

⁶² Ibid., 51-52.

⁶³ Ibid., 248.

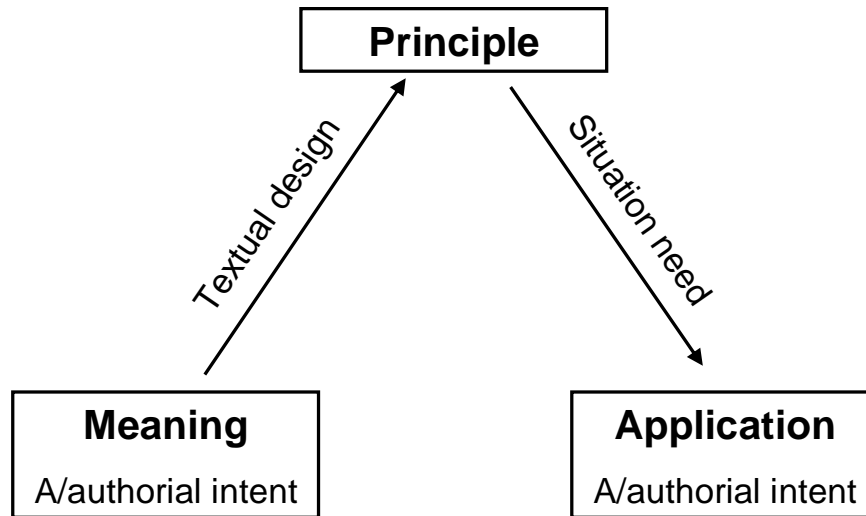


Figure 3.11 Johnson's Model

Timothy Warren (1991)

"A Paradigm for Preaching." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148: 592 (October-December 1991), 463-86.

"The Theological Process in Sermon Preparation." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156: 623 (July-September 1999), 336-56.

"Mind the Gap." *Preaching Magazine* 13: 2 (September-October 1997). 18-22.

"Preaching's Theological Process." Paper presented at the Evangelical Homiletics Society Conference at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, October 16-19, 1997.

"The Expository Process." Unpublished notes from the DM455 *Preaching Topical Expository Sermons* class at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, Winter 2007.

"An Authoritative Homiletic." Unpublished notes from the DM455 *Preaching Topical Expository Sermons* class at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, Winter 2007. "The Place of Pastoral Wisdom in Application." *PreachingToday.com* (March 2005) Part I <http://www.preachingtoday.com/16875>; Part II <http://www.preachingtoday.com/16876> (accessed March 21, 2005).

Warren's expository process consists of four separate bridges and processes.

His first bridge is from revelational (text) to the exegetical (meaning). This bridge is

assumed in all the models being considered. His second bridge connects the exegetical to the theological (principle). This is the basis of chapter four of this thesis. His third bridge is from the theological to the homiletical (sermon). Then the last bridge is from the homiletical back to the revelational (changed lives). Since a changed life glorifies God, it's revelational. See figure 3.12.

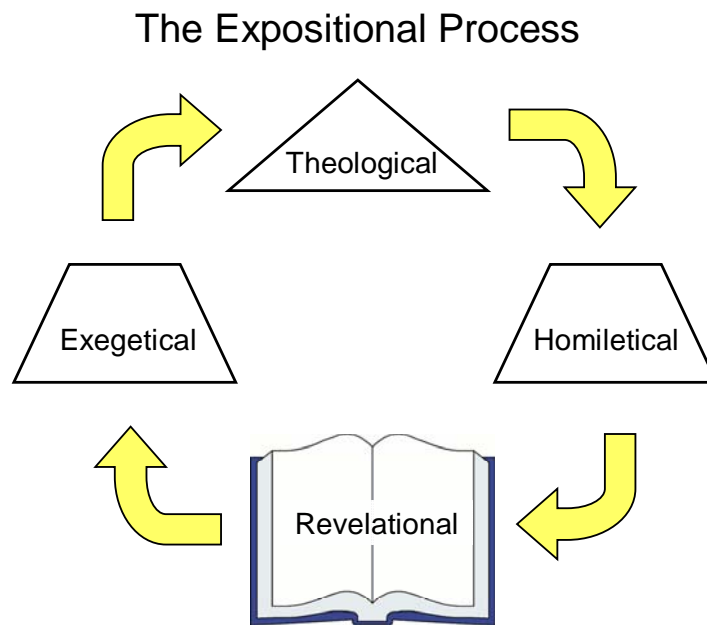


Figure 3.12 Warren's Expositional Process

From exegetical to the theological and in deriving a principle, Warren utilizes three theological movements: biblical theology, canonical theology, and systematic theology. “Biblical theology seeks to identify and interpret the author’s world-view.”⁶⁴ “Canonical theology seeks to discover the connections between earlier expressions of

⁶⁴ Timothy S. Warren, “The Theological Process in Sermon Preparation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156: 623 (July-September 1999): 340.

biblical theology and their counterparts in the progress of biblical revelation.”⁶⁵ Then systematic theology tests and qualifies the preacher’s theological message.

Warren sees each theological movement in itself as a spirical (retroduction) process that keeps on refining and validating the theological proposition (principle). He limits the use of systematic theology after going through the biblical and canonical theology to assure the principle is directly from and firmly grounded in the text. For Warren, the three (textual, transcendent, and timely) purposes and the three (original, universal, and occasional) audiences serve as the two guard rails for the entire theological process (figure 3.13).

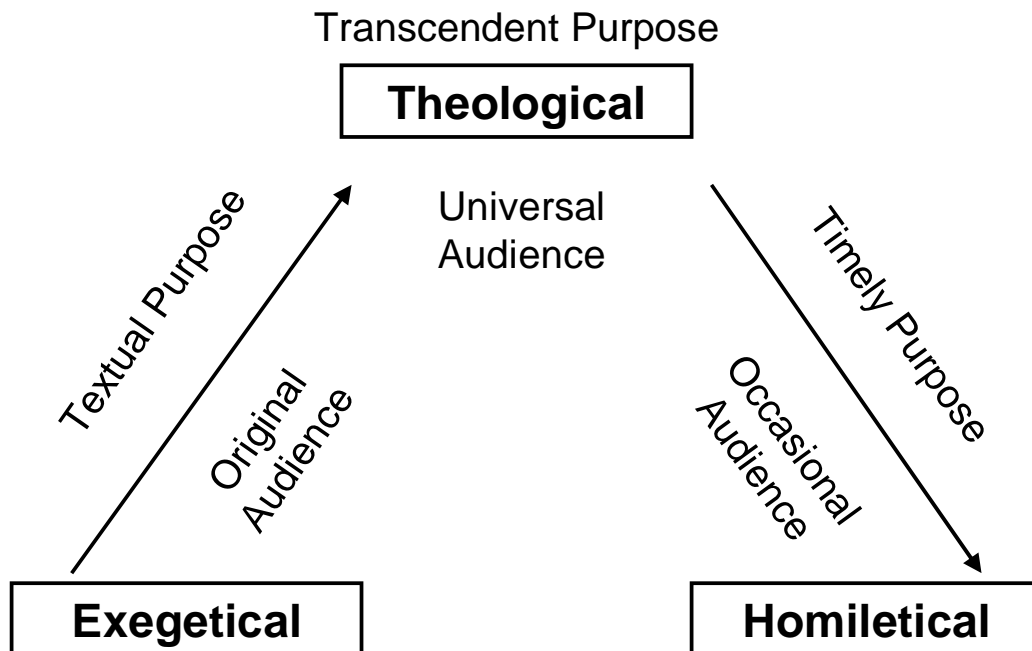


Figure 3.13 Warren's Theological Process

⁶⁵ Ibid., 341.

Minor Players

Minor players have the privilege of exposure to the major players' work. They can expand, fine tune, and clarify what previous authors have done. They either articulate, popularize and/or apply the process to different genres.

Joseph F. Scro (1993)

"The Pastor as Judge: Applying the Law of God from the Pulpit." D.Min. field project report, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993.

Drawing from "the model an interpretivist judge uses in applying the Constitution (or law) to the lives of people,"⁶⁶ Scro proposes "a rhetorical model that has no authoritative place for extra-textual sources, namely, the preacher's personal convictions or the traditions of a group of people."⁶⁷ There are three steps to this model: (1) exegesis of the text, (2) discovery of the principle, and (3) discernment of the need and application of the text.⁶⁸

Instead of laying all the inadequate methods of bridging the gaps⁶⁹ aside, Scro sees them as valid techniques in deriving principles from a certain genre of the text and in contextualizing the principles to the contemporary audience. He divides these techniques into two strategies: textual strategies and theological strategies. Textual strategies include substitution, parallelism, direct transference, and identification. Theological strategies include spiritualization, theologizing, and typologization. See figure 3.14.

⁶⁶ Scro, 309.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 262.

⁶⁹ See "Common Inadequate Methods of Bridging" on pages 12-18.

In his contextualization process, Scro calls for feedback, audience analysis, and claim (call for a specific response).⁷⁰ He recognizes “application needs to be relevant. It must be grounded in need. Application must also be authoritative. It must be grounded in the text . . . application needs to be specific.”⁷¹ It must be grounded in the claim.

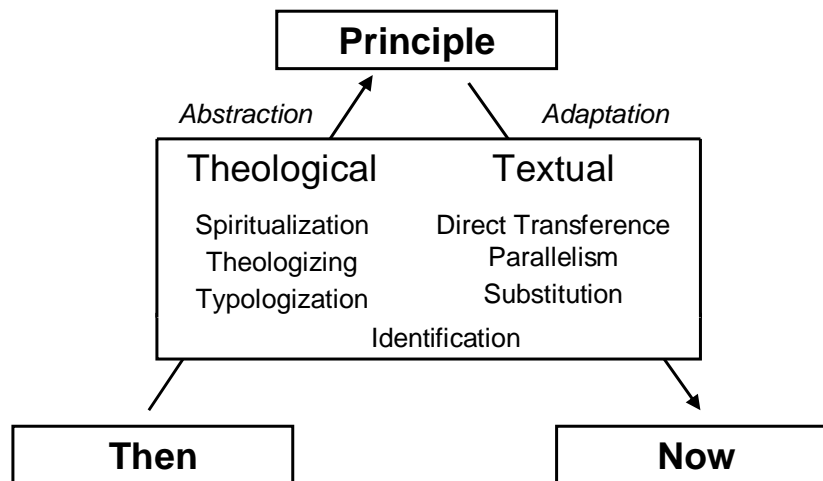


Figure 3.14 Scro's Model

David Veerman (1993)

How to Apply the Bible: Proven Techniques for Discovering the Truths of Scripture and Putting Them into Practice. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993.

Veerman admits that it is a big jump from text to principle, and he breaks the task down into manageable steps by asking nine questions (figure 3.15).⁷²

People: Who are the people in this passage and how are they like us today?
Place: What is the setting and what are the similarities to our world?

⁷⁰ Ibid., 289.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² David Veerman, *How to Apply the Bible: Proven Techniques for Discovering the Truths of Scripture and Putting Them into Practice* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 38-39.

Plot: What is happening? Is there any conflict or tension? How would I have acted in that situation?

Point: What was the intended message for the first people to hear this passage? What did God want them to learn or feel or do?

Principles: What are the timeless truths?

Present: How is this relevant in our world today?

Parallels: Where does this truth apply to my life? At home, at work, at school, in church, in the neighborhood?

Priorities: What attitude, action, value or belief needs to change in me?⁷³

Plan: What would be my first step of action?

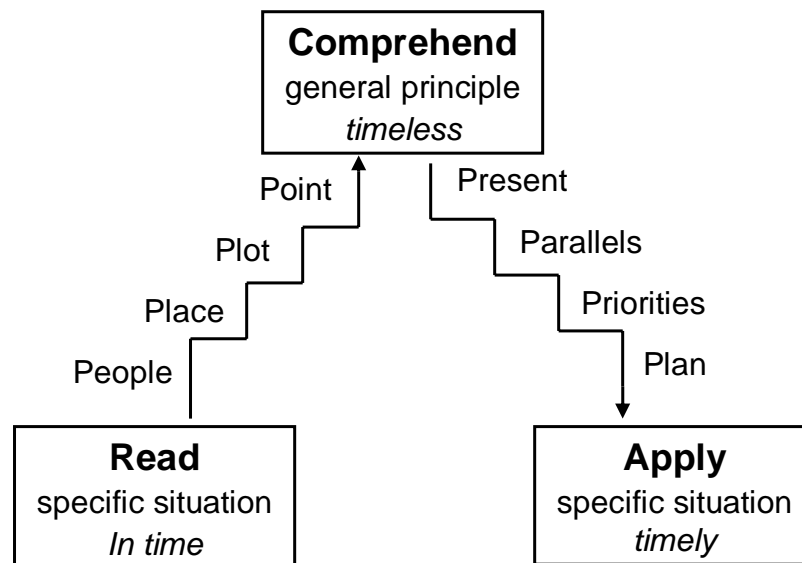


Figure 3.15 Veerman's Application Pyramid

Haddon Robinson (1997)

"The Heresy of Application." *Leadership Journal* 18: 4 (Fall 1997): 20-27.

Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages. 2nd ed.
Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 2001.

"Blending Bible Content and Life Application," In *Mastering Contemporary Preaching*,
ed. B. Hybels, D. S. Briscoe, and H. W. Robinson, 55-65. Portland, OR:
Multnomah, 1990.

⁷³ R. Warren, in quoting Veerman, relabeled this step as "Personal" in his "Three Ways to Apply Scripture."

Robinson affirms “application must come from the theological purpose of the biblical writer”⁷⁴ and offers diagnostic questions in unveiling the author’s theological purpose. He emphasizes application cannot be separated from the text. Thus, a thorough study of the text is a must for accurate application. To bridge the biblical world to the modern world, preachers need to abstract a principle from the text that can “cross over” or be applied to the modern world. In climbing the ladder of abstraction, Robinson abstracts up to God, and asks, “What is the depravity factor? What in humanity rebels against this vision of God?”⁷⁵ Some texts can be applied straight across to the audience. Some need to abstract to the author’s intent in order to cross over. See figure 3.16 (cf. figure 4.26). In contextualizing the principle to the contemporary audience, Robinson asserts there are different levels of authority in applying the principle.⁷⁶

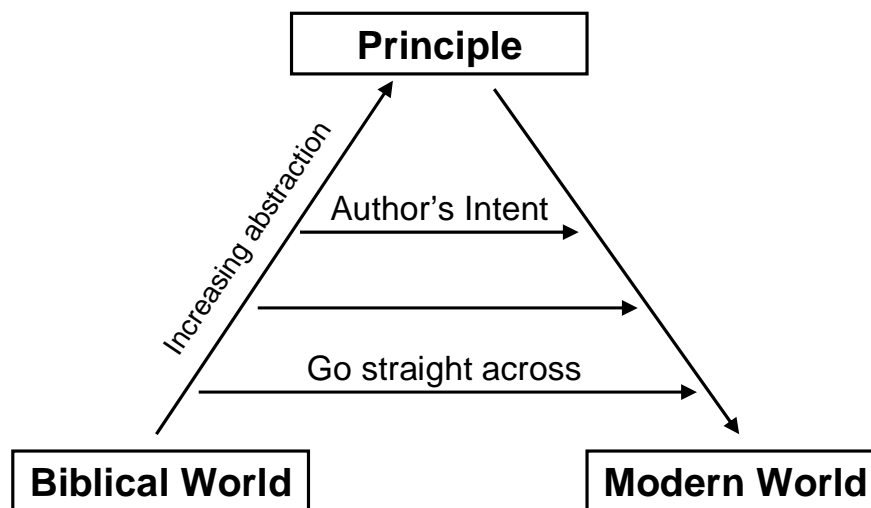


Figure 3.16 Robinson’s Ladder of Abstraction

⁷⁴ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 2nd ed. (2001), 88.

⁷⁵ Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 25-26.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

Rob Barrett (2001)

“Models for a Theology of Biblical Application.” Unpublished paper presented in the THEO 500 *Theological Overview* class at Regent College, Vancouver, B.C., April 17, 2001.

Barrett, drawing from the similarities between the process of inspiration and the process of application, offers a model of application which recognizes three principal thrusts of the Bible: historical, theological and aesthetic. To him, the Bible is aesthetic because it is persuasive literature that aims to inculcate its worldview.⁷⁷ The term “worldview” does not refer to a philosophical thought-system, but to an understanding of reality that has God as its ultimate concern, from which all other understandings are derived. It includes such things as trusted propositions, values and priorities, narratives, methods and interconnections between these diverse elements.⁷⁸

Barrett’s model has three steps: (1) preachers creatively read (exegete and synthesize) the Scripture; (2) preachers harmonize their worldview (heartview) with the biblical worldview; and (3) this God-centered worldview can then be creatively applied with the contemporary world in a manner that is in accord with the nature of Scripture.⁷⁹ This is similar to the basic model (See figure 3.2). His middle element, a biblical worldview, is both the result of exegesis and synthesis, and is the “deposit of truth” from which real world activity is born⁸⁰ (figure 3.17). The arrow in the model allows these historical results to be synthesized back into the worldview as part of the overall

⁷⁷ Barrett, 8.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 7, 10.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 13.

experience. The cycle of creative reading, creative application and creative reflection continues through all of life.⁸¹

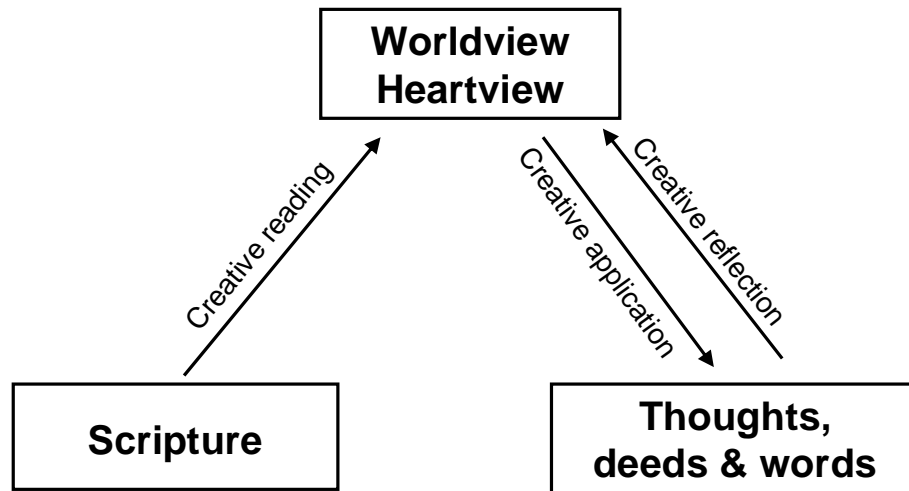


Figure 3.17 Barrett's Model

Barrett offers another perspective about theological principlization. Although he warns about principlization without theologizing,⁸² he realizes that (1) many saints cannot articulate anything like a systematic theology, yet they have a thoroughly Christ-centric worldview, (2) because the Bible is not presented in a systematic form, it is highly questionable whether forming a systematic theology is a necessary step in applying the Bible, and (3) many parts of the Bible resist systemization.⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 15.

⁸³ Ibid., 8-9.

Samuel L. Harbin (2001)

“A Model for Theologically Validating Contemporary Applications from Old Testament Narrative: A Literary Foundation.” D. Min. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001.

Harbin proposes an interpretive model to guide preachers to develop theologically valid sermon applications from Old Testament narratives (OTN). His interpretive model consists of eleven steps utilizing twenty-three consolidated questions gleaned from pertinent literature.

His chapter three, “Discovering the Theological Proposition in OTN texts,”⁸⁴ is of particular interest to this thesis. Harbin provides valuable and comprehensive information for the process of theological principlization. He surveys hermeneutical works and other works dedicated to the study of OTN to come up with key interpretive questions for his OTN interpretive model. Then he organizes the results into two categories: (1) the task of principlizing OTN, and (2) the tensions involved in the task of principlizing.

In the task categories, Harbin defines principlization and lays down a procedure for uncovering principles.⁸⁵ Topics in his discussion include: “A Qualification for Principlization: Authorial Intent,” “Consideration of Priorities for Principlizing,” and “Characteristics of Principlized Statement (Theological Proposition).” He summarizes with fourteen interpretive questions guiding preachers through the task of principlizing.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Harbin, 78-147.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 82-90.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 91-92.

In the tension category, Harbin identifies and discusses six tensions involved in the task of principlizing OTN texts: (1) theocentric vs. anthropocentric: are the stories about God, humans, or both? (2) christocentric interpretation: in what way do OTN texts witness to Christ? (3) dynamic vs. static: reckoning with the progressive nature of biblical revelation; (4) dispensational adjustments: reflecting the discontinuity of the biblical testaments; (5) levels of abstraction in the theological proposition for OTN texts; (6) character perspectives in the articulation of theological propositions: through which character's eyes is the story to be viewed?⁸⁷ After the discussion of each tension, Harbin gleans a set of interpretive questions pertaining to that tension. All together, including those questions in the task category, he lists 50 questions. By the end of chapter three, he consolidates them into seventeen interpretive questions for the task of principlizing OTN texts. He also lays out eight steps to the theological proposition.

Brian Jones (2003):

“Application in Biblical Preaching.” D.Min. thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2003.

To Jones, sermon application is where “the preacher takes certain eternal concepts from the text and uses them to show the modern believer the relevance of those concepts to his or her modern life.”⁸⁸ He uses a three-step approach toward application: (1) understand the original application, (2) abstract the continuing truth, and (3) state the continuing truth in terms appropriate to modern life. Jones likens the second step to

⁸⁷ Ibid., 93-136.

⁸⁸ Jones, “Application in Biblical Preaching,” 36.

building a bridge that spans over a chasm.⁸⁹ Jones recognizes that not all texts require a bridge to cross over from the biblical audience to the contemporary one; these texts he identifies as “sidewalk” passages. These passages are timelessly relevant by three criteria: they (1) address universal sins, (2) reveal universal theology, and (3) have immediate cultural parallels.⁹⁰

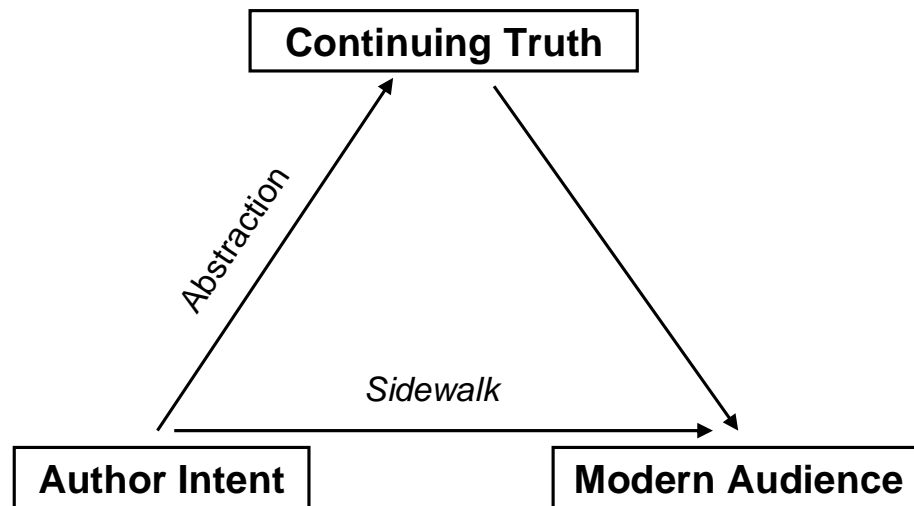


Figure 3.18 Jones' Model

Jones' approach supplements and integrates well with the process Robinson advocates in *Biblical Preaching*. Chapter four of this thesis will offer a more in-depth focus on Jones' step #2: building the bridge and expanding on the techniques of abstraction.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 62-64.

John William French (2003)

“Virtue or Vice: The Personal Application of Epistolary Ethical Lists in their Historical, Canonical, and Hermeneutical Contexts.” (Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, 2003).

In his introduction in chapter one, French delineates “the need for biblical application” and “the need for a theory of application.” In chapter four, “Hermeneutical: Theological Contextual of Personal Application,” he provides a comprehensive and up-to-date review on the theory of application. He presents a solid biblical and theological argument of bridging the “then” and “now.” French not only discusses the validity of principlization, but also introduces other scholars’ models in bridging the gap.

Players of Other Teams

These are players who do not subscribe to the principlization model in application. The two mentioned here are notable for their high view of the Scripture and distinctive models of applying the Old Testament to today’s society. They offer insights and clarify some of the issues involved in the process of principlization.

Christopher J. H. Wright (1983)

An Eye for an Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983.

Old Testament Ethics for the People of God. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004.

Wright divides his approach into three challenges: “Get there,” “Get back,” and “Ethical authority.”⁹¹ He sees God’s primary purpose was to create “a new community who in their social life would embody those qualities of righteousness, peace,

⁹¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 441-71.

justice and love which reflect God's own character and were his original purpose for mankind."⁹² Thus Israel becomes a paradigm for today's Christians in revealing God's moral consistency. God's relation to Israel is a reflection of His relation to the fallen creation.⁹³

Wright looks at the impact of Israel's worldview on its ethics through two triangles from three perspectives: the theological, the social, and the economic. He argues that an understanding of how the Old Testament law contributed to the nation of Israel (represented by the inner redemptive triangle) as a whole can help today's Christians (represented by the outer fallen creation triangle) search for analogically proper applications in contemporary situations (figure 3.19).⁹⁴

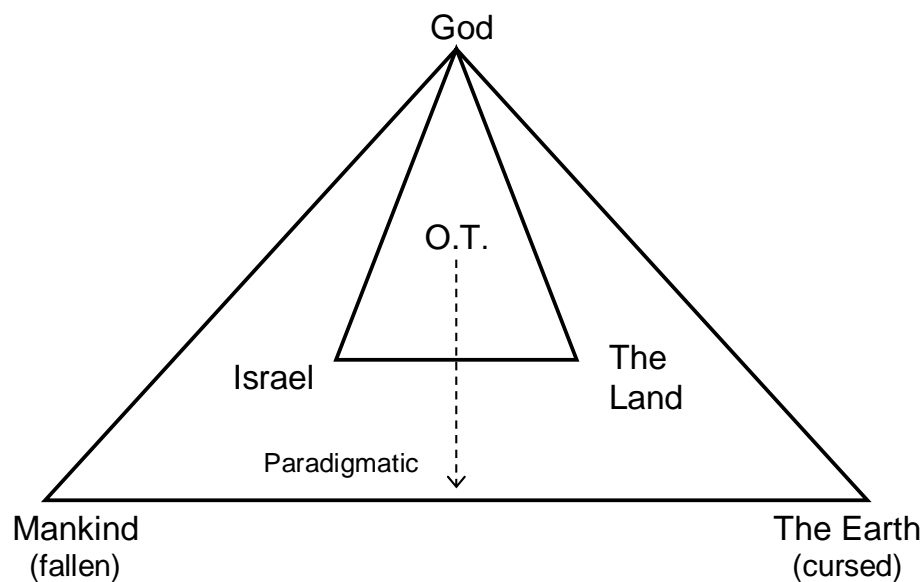


Figure 3.19 Wright's Paradigm Triangles I

⁹² Ibid., 351.

⁹³ Christopher J. H. Wright, *An Eye for An Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 88.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 90, 100.

Based on God's redemptive purpose which was initiated through Israel, God will ultimately embrace all nations and the whole earth, in a transformed and perfect new creation. This means the redemptive triangle will ultimately "transcend" (break through) the triangle of fallen creation, and will carry on an eschatological meaning.⁹⁵ See figure 3.20.

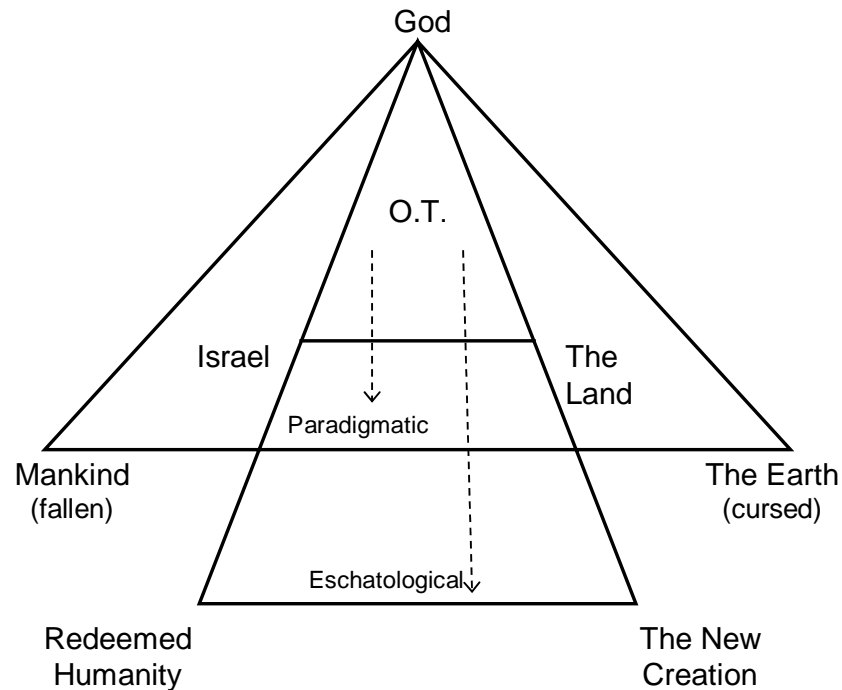


Figure 3.20 Wright's Paradigm Triangles II

Wright's main concern is in Old Testament ethics, the paradigmatic approach is giving some theological backing in the area of continuity for theological principlization. Though Hays⁹⁶ views Wright's paradigmatic approach is identical to the principlization embraced by this thesis, this researcher believes that they are different. An analysis

⁹⁵ Ibid., 90.

⁹⁶ J. Daniel Hays, "Applying the Old Testament Law Today," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158: 629 (January-March 2001): 30 (footnote #13).

comparing and contrasting the two approaches would require further study beyond the scope of this thesis.

William J. Webb (2001)

Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis.
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Webb outlines a redemptive-hermeneutic for applying the Scripture. He believes that God gave moral commands during biblical times that were of higher moral standards than those of the surrounding culture, but were not yet His highest ideal. Hence, Webb envisions an X-Y-Z movement model in which “X” represents the original culture, “Y” represents the biblical text, and “Z” represents the “ultimate ethic” which is reflected in the spirit of the biblical text. Thus, between Y and Z is our contemporary culture which “reflects a better ethic than Y.” See figure 3.21.⁹⁷

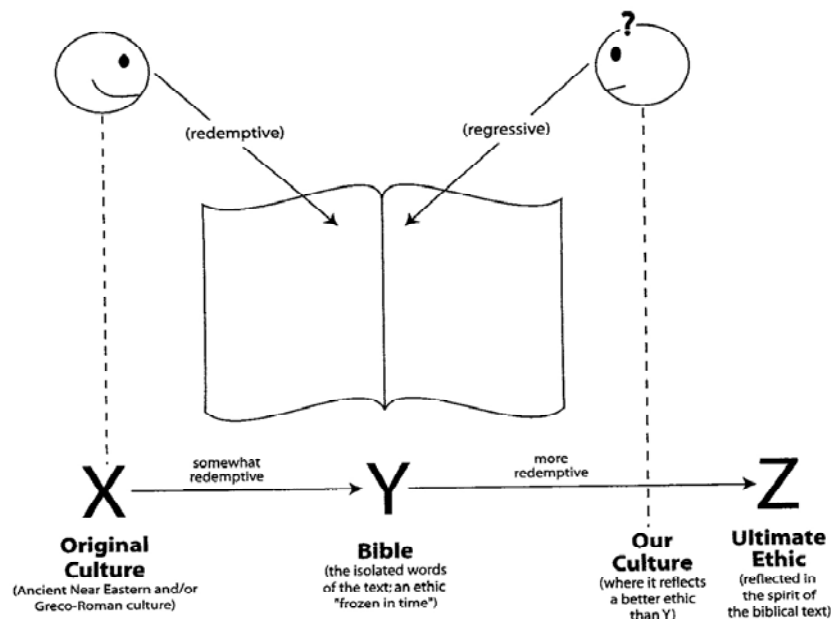


Figure 3.21 Webb's Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic

⁹⁷ William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women, & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 32.

To Webb, the Christian's task is not to lock into an ethic that has been frozen in time, but to discover God's "ultimate ethic," by sensing the redemptive spirit of the text and following the direction of the trajectory.⁹⁸ He sets forth eighteen criteria to discern the direction of God's "redemptive movement," and uses two "neutral examples" of slavery and homosexuality to demonstrate the validity of his redemptive-movement hermeneutic. These examples also serve as "guardrails" leading to his egalitarianism.

Webb's effort in explaining how to go about making application that is not stated explicitly in the text is commendable. His premises that (1) God is setting up an "ultimate ethic" and (2) there exists a "redemptive spirit" among the biblical authors are yet to be justified biblically. He sanctions his redemptive movement beyond what the text allows. He over-extrapolates the text and assumes there is a theological movement in application. It is the text that is inspired and not the method of application.

Though Webb's hermeneutical method draws a lot of criticism and his examples are loaded with problems, he nevertheless contributes to the current research in providing a concise description of the "ladder of abstraction"⁹⁹ and in demonstrating its use with Leviticus 19:10.¹⁰⁰ His list of eighteen criteria by which to judge the movement along the ladder are insightful to the process of moving from text to application.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 256.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 53-54.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 210.

Conclusion

The study of application, especially the process of theological principlization, is a relatively new subject. Most major players developed their methods independently. Because their methods are not uniform in terminology or in approach, preachers desiring to implement the theological principlization process need to match the concepts and synthesize the materials among the authors. Each author contributes differently to the process of theological principlization. Some offer more on screening guidelines from the text to the principle. Some oversee the entire process. Some concentrate more on the movement from the principle to the sermon. Some make insightful observations to a few specific areas of the entire process. Among all the aforementioned authors, only Kuhatschek, Robinson, Scro, and T. S. Warren offer the techniques of how to generalize a principle.

CHAPTER 4

THE SEMINAR: AFTER GOD’S HEART

“Truth is truth whenever and wherever found. The great theological truths that spoke to the hearts of Bible people can speak to our own day as well.”¹ How to find these timeless truths from the Book of Truth is what this seminar is all about. The process of principlization² will be taught in an eight-hour seminar divided into three sessions: (1) Theological Principlization, (2) Vertical Movement, and (3) Horizontal Movement.

Session One: Principlization

What is Principlization?

Theological Principlization is the process of deriving a principle that links the biblical text to today’s contemporary audience. This principle strives to remain true to the authorial intent while theologically bridging the chasm that exists between the historical text and 21st century audiences.

It is a process, not a product. This implies that there is not one final, absolute product. It is a process of discovery and of continually discovering the appropriate

¹ Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 123.

² Some authors spell it as “principlization” (Richard), or “principalization” (Pratt).

principle. A principle may fit best in one situation and yet fail to be relevant when the needs of the audience change. Kuhatschek clarifies:

Finding the general principles in Scripture is not the same as looking for proof-texts. Neither is it an attempt to tie up the truths of Scripture into neat little propositional packages. Rather, we look beyond the specific commands, examples and promises of Scripture in order to seek the mind and heart of God. We want to grasp not only *what* God said (although that is extremely important) but also *why* he said it. Our passion is to develop a godly mindset, a world view that is shaped by the broad scope of Scripture.³

The principle is developed from the biblical text and is readily applicable to the current audience. It unifies the text and the audience. That is, the text leads to the principle, and the principle is relevant to the audience.

This is part of the expositional process (figure 3.12).⁴ Several authors have outlined a similar procedure.⁵ It is the theological process on which we are focusing: moving away from the text to the principle and from the principle to the contemporary audience. Some scholars liken this process to a bridge-building process (figure 4.1).⁶

³ Kuhatschek, 62. *Italics are the author's.*

⁴ See pages 57-59. The expositional process has four stages: revelational, exegetical, theological and homiletical. See T. S. Warren, "A Paradigm for Preaching," 463-486. The article was later revised, renamed as "The Expositional Process," and given as a reading assignment in DM455 *Preaching Topical Expository Sermons* at Dallas Theological Seminary, Winter 2007.

⁵ See Freeman, "Managing the Middle" in *Variety in Biblical Preaching*, 39-45; Greidanus, "The Relevance of the Sermon" in *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 157-87; Kaiser, "The Old Testament as a Way of Life" in *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*, 157-66; McDill, "Bridging from Text to Sermon" in *The 12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching*, 120-32; Richard, "The Purpose Bridge: the Brain of the Sermon" in *Scripture Sculpture*, 18, 79-85; Stott, "Preaching as Bridge-Building" in *Between Two Worlds*, 135-79. Though they may use different vocabularies, their methods have the same nuances as the one presented in this seminar. In addition, John Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1981), 55, lists the following scholars as those who employ the same procedure: R. H. Preston, "Middle Axioms in Christian Social Ethics," *Crucible* 10 (1971): 9-15; idem, "From the Bible to the Modern World: A Problem for Ecumenical Ethics," *Bulletin of John Rylands Library* 59(1976-77): 164-87; S. Paradise, "Visions of the Good Society and the Energy Debate," *Anglican Theological Review* 61(1979): 106-17.

⁶ See Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Co., 2002); and Duvall and Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to*

They picture a bridge with two solid foundations. The foundation on the left represents the preaching text and the biblical world. The foundation on the right represents the contemporary audience in the modern world.⁷ The bridge is the theological principle bridging the chasm created by generational, geographical, cultural, historical, linguistic, literary and spiritual gaps.⁸ In one sense every sermon preparation is a bridge-building process. How the text morphs into a principle is what this seminar is focusing on.⁹

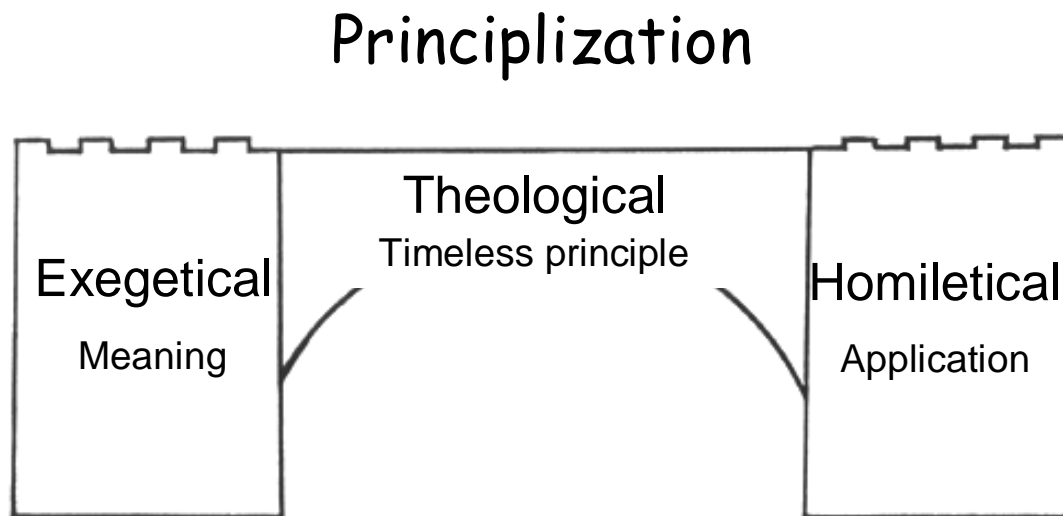


Figure 4.1 The Three Components of Principlization:
A Bridge-Building Process

Reaching, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible. Mathewson wrote the best concise three-page scholarly summary of the bridge-building process on pages 101-103. Duvall and Hays give an excellent layman's version they call "the Interpretive Journey," describing the process involved in this bridge-building process on pages 19-25; 205-212. Cf. also Kuhatschek, 33. Keith Willhite, *Preaching with Relevance Without Dumbing Down* (Grand Rapids, Kregel Publications, 2001), 64; Jones, "Application in Biblical Preaching", 36, 65-68; Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 288; Roy Zuck, "Application in Biblical Hermeneutics and Exposition" in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, ed. Donald K. Campbell (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), 27-28.

⁷ See Richard, "Application Theory in Relation to the New Testament," 206-7.

⁸ See Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 16-18; Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 117.

⁹ Though relevancy is an important and absolute necessity of sermon application, this seminar concentrates on the process of theological principlization and on making the journey from the text to the contemporary audience.

The Two Foundations

The foundation on the left represents the historical context of the biblical text. In order to have a solid foundation, preachers have to answer the following questions “adequately.”¹⁰

1. What is the subject?
2. What is the complement?
3. Why did the Author/author say it? What was His/his authorial intent?¹¹
4. How did the Author/author accomplish His/his purpose? What genre, expressions, and literary forms did He/he use? ¹²

Preachers can refer to hermeneutical books and commentaries in suggesting answers to the above questions. This seminar’s main focus is the bridge-building process from the “then” to the “now.”

The foundation on the right is the contemporary situation of today’s audience. Whenever a preacher preaches, he preaches to a specific group of people with their specific needs and their particular situation in mind. Preachers can learn this skill from homiletical books, supplemented by anthropological and sociological analysis. Pastors can also gain valuable insights in contacting their congregation through the various

¹⁰ A thorough exegetical process should yield reliable answers to these questions. Preachers can refer to standard hermeneutics and exegetical textbooks for further information. See also Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, KN: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction*; Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, (2001); Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, 3rd ed., (Louisville, KN: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*; Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*.

¹¹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 40-42.

¹² This step requires more than identifying the literary form. One needs to understand how that literary form functions and accomplishes the author’s intent. See Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, 11-22. Cf. pages 50-53.

ministries of the church. The better a preacher understands his audience, the firmer is the foundation in the right.

A Bridge Building Process

A preacher is ready to build the bridge only when he has both foundations firmly anchored (cf. figure 4.8). He is ready to build the bridge when he can say confidently to himself, “I know the passage, and I know my audience.” Only then is he ready to ask, “What is God saying to the audience through this passage for their particular situation?” This is the bridge-building process we call “theological principlization.”

Examples of Principlization

Example 1: Jesus washing his disciples’ feet

Objective: To illustrate how a principle works

Scripture: John 13:1-17

Interpretation: Jesus washed the disciples’ feet and left them with an example of humility: to serve rather than desire to be served. In Jesus’ time, people wore sandals, and it was customary that a servant washed the guests’ feet upon their entering a home. Jesus’ intention was not to call contemporary Christians to wash each other’s feet, but to encourage them to serve the needs of others even if it involves lowly, menial tasks.

Principle: Humbly serving others according to their needs.

Application: Serving others may include such menial tasks as changing the diapers in the nursery, taking the baptismal robes home to wash them, cleaning the sanctuary bathrooms, or emptying the kitchen trash. See figure 4.2.

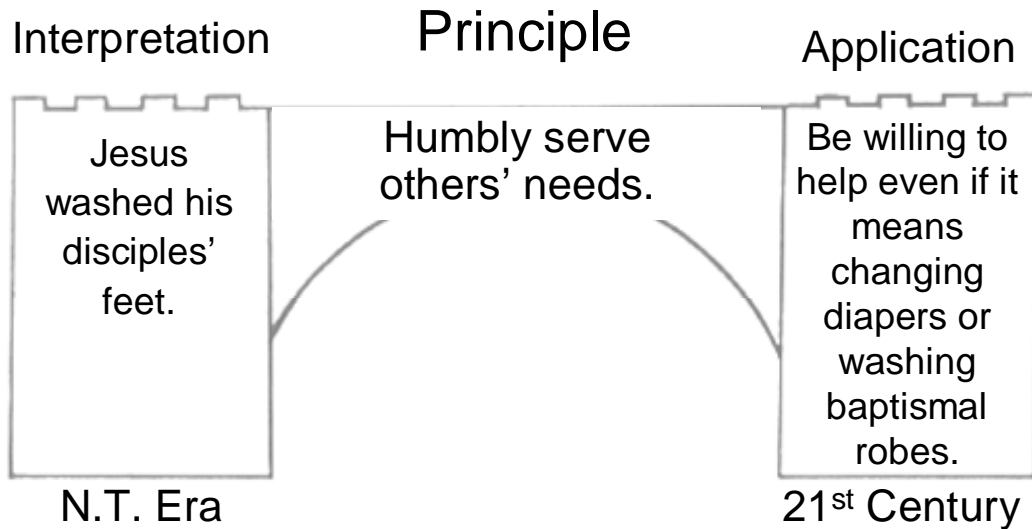


Figure 4.2 John 13:1-17

Example 2: Wearing clothing of the opposite gender

Objective: To clarify timely and timeless elements in Scripture

Scripture: Deuteronomy 22:5

Interpretation: The command is clear: “A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing.” Since the Scriptures do not identify what are men’s clothing or women’s clothing, one can assume the distinction was well-identified in Moses’ time. Although the Scriptures are silent about the specifics of the occasion for which this command was given, the reason given was: “For whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.” We have an immutable God. His desire will not be altered without reason. This prohibition is still valid today--it is a timeless principle.

Principle: Women should not wear men’s clothing, and men should not wear women’s clothing.

Application: In this 21st century, when one enters a department store, it is clear that it divides into men's and women's clothing departments. This clearly demonstrates that there are differences between men's and women's clothing. Therefore, women should not wear clothing from the men's department, and men should not wear clothing from the women's department. Although the distinction between men's and women's clothing changes through time, culture and customs, God's prohibition remains unaltered. It is to be obeyed. See figure 4.3.

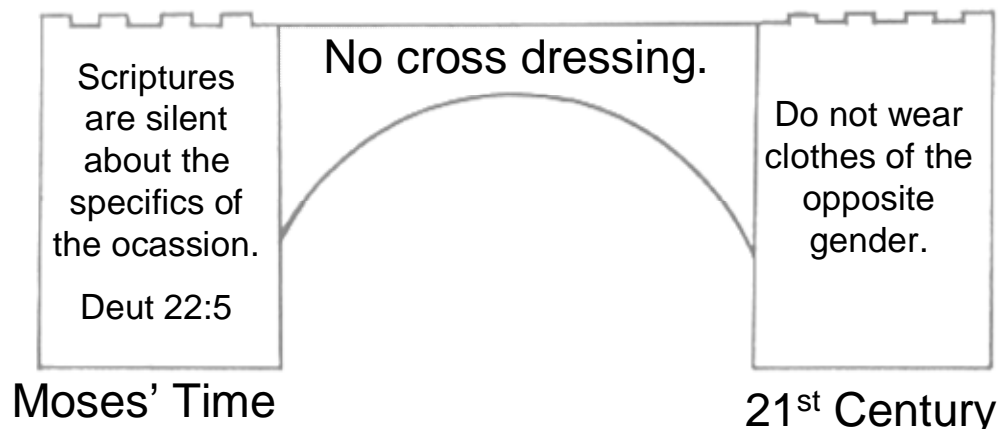


Figure 4.3 Cross Dressing

Example 3: Woman's clothing and adornments

Objective: To illustrate the application of a principle to the contemporary audience

Scripture: 1 Timothy 2:9

Interpretation: There were, in the Ephesus church, women who adorned themselves with "braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments." The way they dressed may have been similar to those of the local temple prostitutes or may have reflected the latest style of their day. However, because their attire attracted lustful attention to themselves,

Paul wrote that their dress was inappropriate for women who worship God. Paul, instead, urged them to dress modestly.

Principle: Women should dress modestly.

Application: In our contemporary culture it is not so easy to define what is “proper” and what is “improper.” Fortunately, Paul further described a standard for proper clothing: “modestly and discreetly.” Together they mean that women should not dress in such a way that stimulates lustful desires. Clothing that exposes the sensitive parts of the body by being too tight, too thin, or too revealing are not suitable for Christian women, for they can lead others into lustful thoughts or sin. See figure 4.4.



Figure 4.4 Women's Clothing

Example 4: Handling incest among God's people

Objective: To demonstrate how principlization helps in understanding a specific topic

Scripture: Leviticus 20:11; 1 Corinthians 5:1-2

Interpretation: In Moses' time, those involved in an incestuous relationship were punished by death. During the first century, at the Corinthian Church, those involved in

an incestuous relationship were not put to death, but were removed from the church.

Why the same sin, yet different punishments? Is the Bible inconsistent? No! The change in time and situation resulted in the different handling of the sin. However, the principle remains the same.

Principle: Those involved in an incestuous relationship are to be disciplined publicly.

However, because incest is a sin against the marriage relationship and can be considered an act of adultery, one may abstract this principle to a higher level: Those involved in an adulterous relationship are to be disciplined publicly.

Analysis: In Moses' time, Israel was governed by theocracy. Religious leaders doubled as political leaders. The servant of God had the authority to rule over the Israelites and had the authority to put the culprits to death. By the New Testament era, there was a separation of religion and the state, and the authority to rule fell onto the local government. Therefore, the Apostle Paul could only demand the Corinthian Church to exercise church discipline by removing the unrepentant sinners from the church. See figure 4.5.

Application: In the western world, the contemporary church can no longer physically remove people from church or prohibit others from attending Sunday services. In today's terms, the church can remove the unrepentant sinners from the membership roll, rebuke them publicly, and even forbid them from partaking of the Lord's Supper. See figure 4.6.

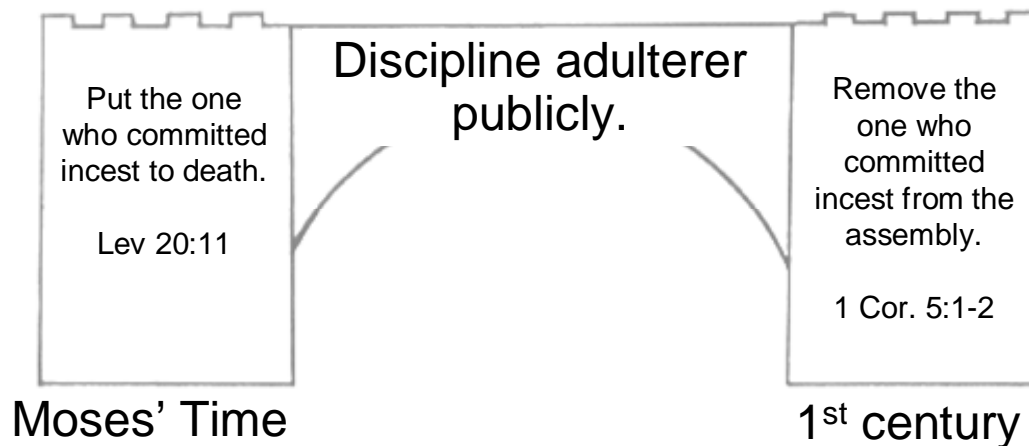


Figure 4.5 Discipline Adulterer I

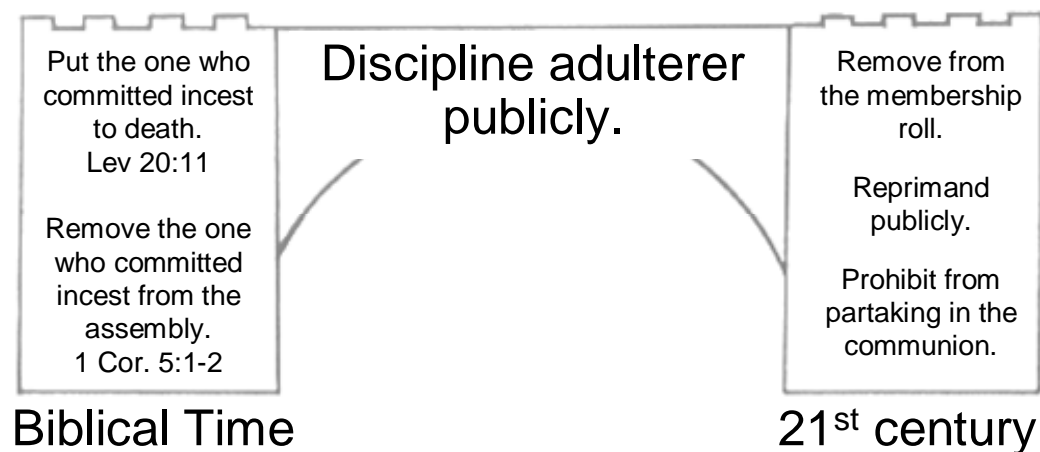


Figure 4.6 Discipline Adulterer II

Example 5: Handling an adulterous woman

Objective: To Illustrate how principlization sheds light on understanding a passage

Scripture: Leviticus 20:10; John 8:3-6

Interpretation: Jesus understood the change of time. The authority to govern was no longer in His hands, but in the government's. Therefore, He did not fall into the trap set by the Scribes and Pharisees: asking the people to stone the adulterous woman to death.

Common sense would dictate that when the woman was “caught in adultery, in the very act,” they should have caught both the adulterous man and the woman. But they brought only the woman: Why? It is reasonable to believe that this woman was a victim, a pawn used by men. More likely, she was set up by the Scribes and Pharisees to test Jesus.

Most adulterous acts happened behind closed doors. If not for an informant or conspirator, how could the Pharisees have caught her “in the very act?” When she was finally brought to Jesus, she was probably not properly dressed and was ashamed. Jesus saw that the principle of an “adulterer to be disciplined publicly” had been fulfilled and showed pity on her. So He forgave her and commanded her not to sin again (John 8:11).

Principle: Adulterers are to be disciplined publicly. See figure 4.7.

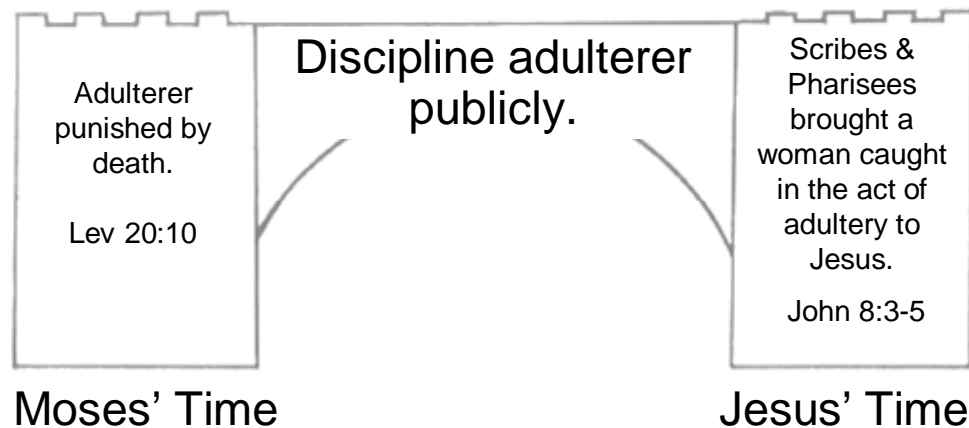


Figure 4.7 Discipline Adulterer III

Application: In our western culture, implementing this principle is much more complicated because what the Bible considers as “adultery” and what contemporary society considers as “adultery” are different. In today’s society, adulteries like incest and having sex with a minor are crimes that the government will pursue and prosecute. In

these cases, the church may only have to make known the biblical standard to which she adheres. But for other sexual relationships, like homosexuality, divorce and remarriage, that are considered acceptable to the society, yet prohibited by the Bible, the church has a much greater responsibility to uplift the biblical standard. Church leaders are to handle these situations with wisdom and discipline the unrepentant culprits publicly yet within the boundaries of the laws of their government.

Why Principization?

It is a Matter of Authority

Preachers may wonder the value of principlizing. In essence, principlization is the derivation of a relevant application from a passage while adhering to the authority of “Thus says the Lord.” When Richard called this principlizing process “contemporization,” he rightly asserted that it transitions from “Thus says the Lord” to “Thou art the man.”¹³ See figure 4.8.

¹³ Richard, *Scripture Sculpture*, 18. “Thou art the man” is the pivotal statement Nathan used when he confronted David about his scheme in murdering Uriah and taking his wife (2 Samuel 12:7). It is used here as a personal response to “Thus says the Lord.”

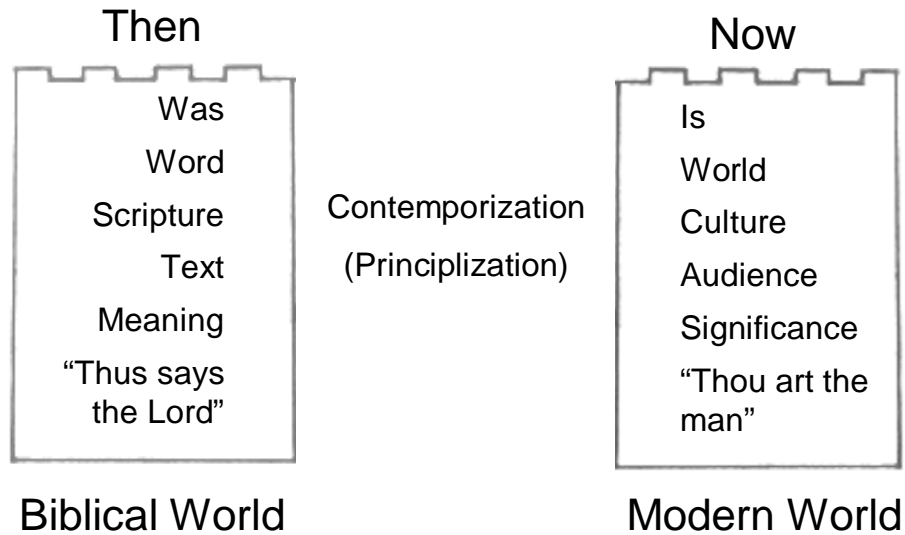


Figure 4.8 The Two Worlds

There are different degrees of authority in one's approach to the pulpit.

Figure 4.9 illustrates those degrees:¹⁴

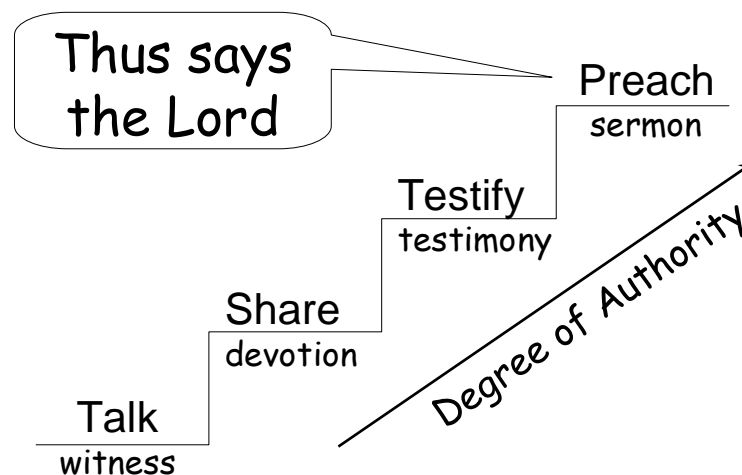


Figure 4.9 Degree of Authority

¹⁴ T. S. Warren has another grid system reflecting four levels of authority in sharing the Word of God. They are, in ascending order: (1) talk; (2) devotion; (3) lecture; (4) sermon. (Unpublished notes from the DM 455 *Preaching Topical Expository Sermons* class at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, Winter 2007). Cf. also Timothy J. Ralston, " 'Back to the Future:' Classical Categories of Exegesis, Application and Authority for Preaching and Spiritual Formation," *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 3: 2 (December 2003): 33-51. Ralston uses three ancient forms of *lectio* to explain the relative authority of a message.

What is “Biblical”?

The term “biblical” may also mean different things to different people. It all depends on where one draws one’s line. In the Scripture, there are prohibitions and imperatives. Prohibitions are those “thou shalt not” commands, and imperatives are those “thou shalt” commands. But in between there are actions and events being recorded or not even being mentioned in the Scripture (figure 4.10). This seminar limits its use to the prohibitions and imperatives of commands explicitly recorded in the Bible. For those events that are recorded or about which the Bible is silent, they are neither “biblical” nor “unbiblical.” See figure 4.11.

Where do you draw your line?

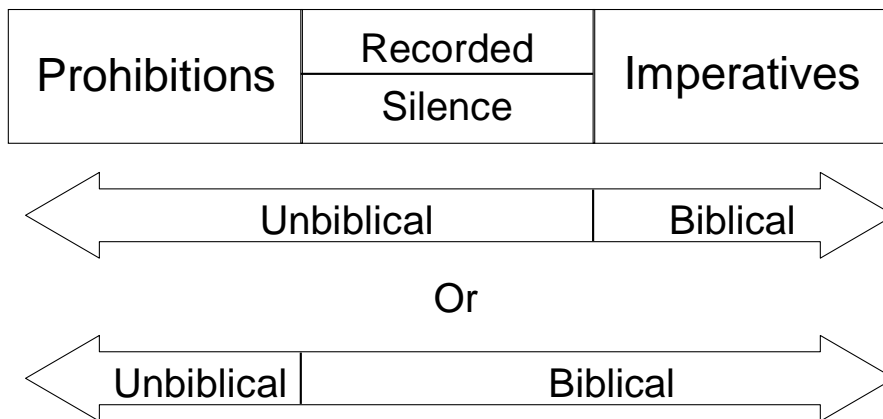
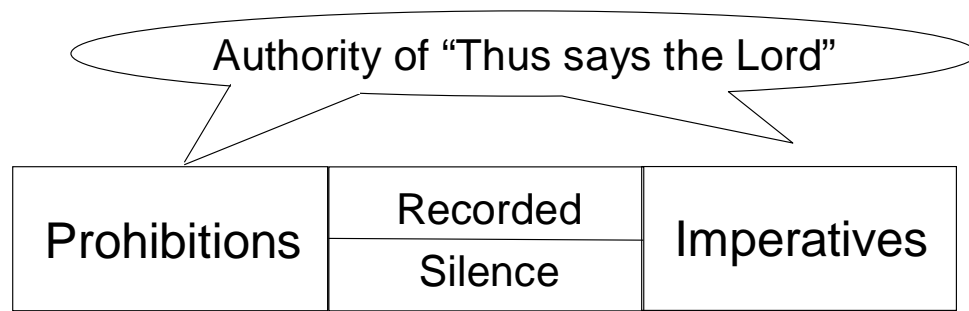


Figure 4.10 What Is Biblical?



Only those Scriptures clearly marked as prohibitions or imperatives have the authority of "Thus says the Lord."

Figure 4.11 "Thus Says The Lord"

Weaver's Hierarchy of Values

Weaver offers another way of looking at this authoritative issue.¹⁵ Weaver's hierarchy of values asserts that there is a four-fold hierarchy of arguments. From the highest appeal to the lowest, they are: truth, analogy, consequence and circumstance. See figure 4.12.

¹⁵ Richard M. Weaver, "Language is Sermonic," in *Language is Sermonic: Richard M. Weaver on the Nature of Rhetoric*, ed. R.L. Johannesen, R. Strickland, and R.T. Eubanks, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 5-8.

Richard Weaver's Hierarchy of Values

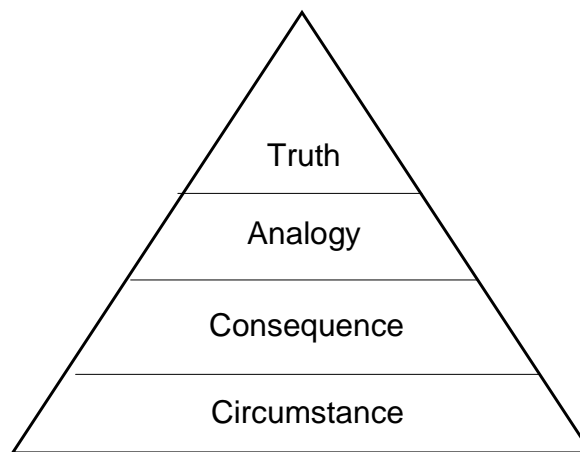


Figure 4.12 Richard Weaver's Hierarchy Of Values I

The highest form of argument is truth. For example, for a biblist, the command that God forbids sex outside of marriage (Exod. 20:14; 1 Cor. 6:18-7:2; 1 Thess. 4:3-6) is an argument from the truth. This is an argument from first cause or principle, which this seminar considers as authoritative because it carries the authority of “thus says the Lord.” The next step down in the hierarchy of values is analogy. These are arguments based on relationships of similarity and dissimilarity.¹⁶ If one were to argue from analogy, one might say, “Since Joseph did not commit adultery, so shouldn’t you (Genesis 39:7-10).” Further down the hierarchy, the third level of argument is from cause and effect: “Since adultery may lead to AIDS, one should abstain from any adulterous relationship.” The last and weakest form of argument is circumstance. An example of this argument is: “Our society despises adulterers.” See figure 4.13.

¹⁶ Ibid., 5.

Richard Weaver's Hierarchy of Values

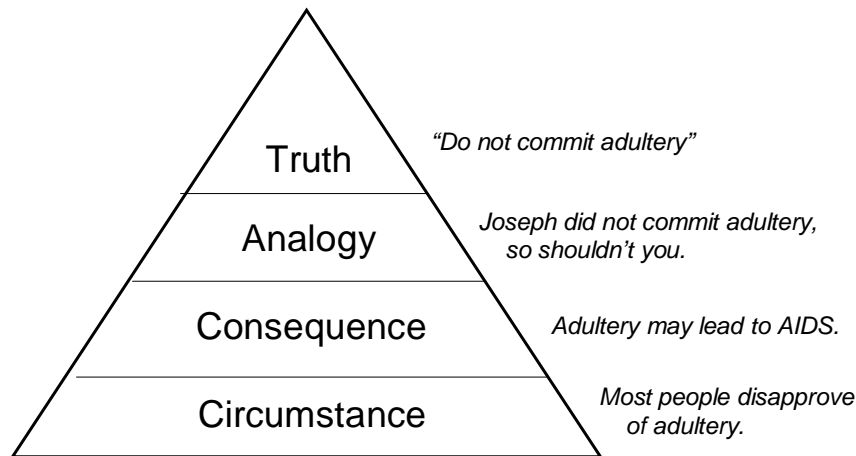


Figure 4.13 Richard Weaver's Hierarchy Of Values II

Principlizing is the process of pursuing a connection from the text to an application that carries the authority of the Lord. By basing the argument on the highest level of Weaver's hierarchy of values, principlization allows preachers to look for the highest appeal using the strongest argument in linking the text to contemporary application.

How to Principlize?

Assuming the preacher has done his study and has identified the desired response from the biblical audience, he is now ready to move from the "then" foundation toward the "now" foundation. The preacher can make his move vertically and horizontally.

Session Two: Vertical Movement: Generalizing and Particularizing

Once a preacher has a firm grip of both foundations, he can begin to move upward using the ladder of abstraction. How high he builds will depend on the width of

the chasm below and the amount of continuities and discontinuities between the two foundations. The more discontinuities there are, the higher he needs to abstract the principle. The more continuities there are, the lower he has to build.

The Ladder of Abstraction

Example 6: Eating food sacrificed to idols¹⁷

Objective: To introduce and illustrate how to use the ladder of abstraction.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 8

Interpretation: Paul advised the Corinthian Christians to abstain from foods sacrificed to idols because eating such food might cause weaker Christians to stumble. Paul states in verses 4-5 that because there is only one God, any food offered to idols is spiritually neutral (v. 8) and is allowable for Christians to eat. However, if a weak Christian who does not have such knowledge (v. 7) were to see other Christians who have this knowledge eating those foods sacrificed to idols, his weak conscience might be strengthened to eat the foods offered to idols. If this were the case, Paul advised the Corinthian Christians to limit their freedom and abstain from eating such foods. The reason? That they might not cause the weaker Christian to stumble (vs. 9, 13), wounding his conscience (v.12), ruining his faith (v.11) and sinning against him (v.12). For the Corinthian Christians, eating food sacrificed to idols would violate the principle Paul set forth in verse 1: “Love edifies.”

¹⁷ See also Gary K.G. Choong, “To Design a Homiletics Curriculum to Equip Students at Singapore Bible College Toward Effective Preaching of Expository Sermons Which are True to Authorial Intent, Clear, Relevant, and Interesting,” (D. Min. thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2001), 230-31; Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 24. Both Choong and Robinson use this example to illustrate their models.

Analysis: Kuhatschek points out that there are three levels of application. See figure 4.14.¹⁸

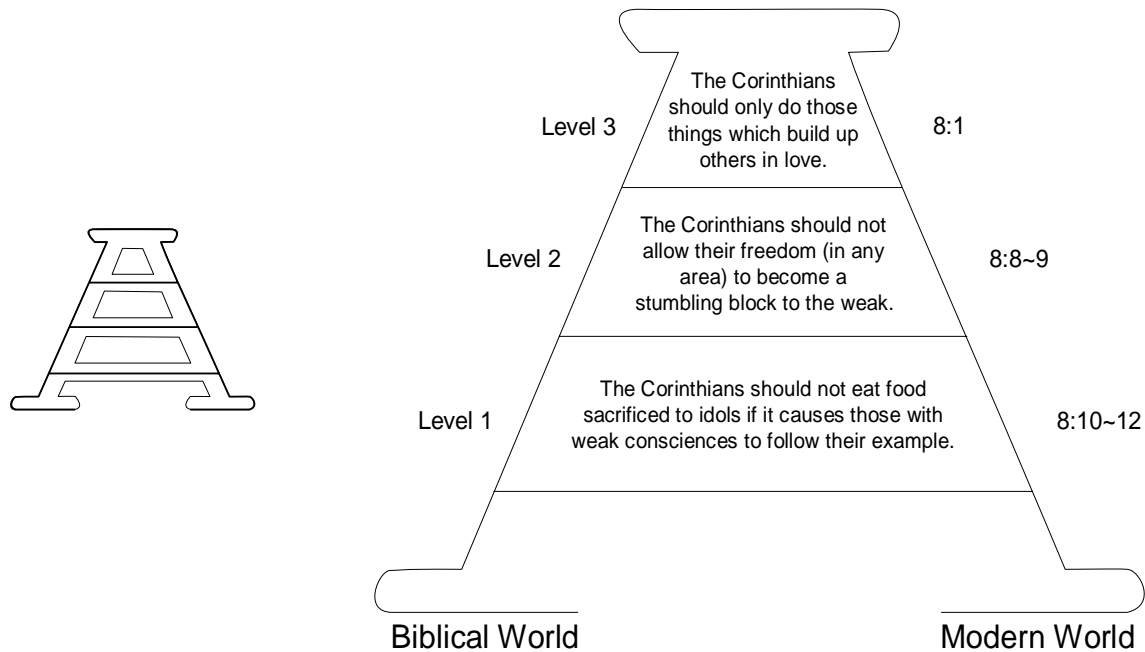


Figure 4.14 Ladder of Abstraction I

Some scholars¹⁹ identify this method of moving up from the particularities of a passage to the generality of a “middle axiom” and then back down to the particularities of applying the universal principles in the context of the contemporary audience as the “ladder of abstraction.”²⁰ The ladder transitions on the left side from a low level of

¹⁸ Kuhatschek, 54-57.

¹⁹ See Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*, 164-65.

²⁰ The concept of abstracting is innate in everyone. The first explicit and systematic representation was given by Alfred Korzyski in *Science and Sanity*. S.I. Hayakawa, a semanticist, was the first to diagram an “abstraction ladder” in *Language in Thought and Action* to explain the process of

specificity to higher levels of increasing generality, then transitions down the right side from a general level of application down to increasingly more specific ones.²¹

Kuhatschek labels this as different levels of application.²² He asks three questions to help preachers derive the timeless principles.²³ Using Example 6 above, this can be visualized by figure 4.15 below.

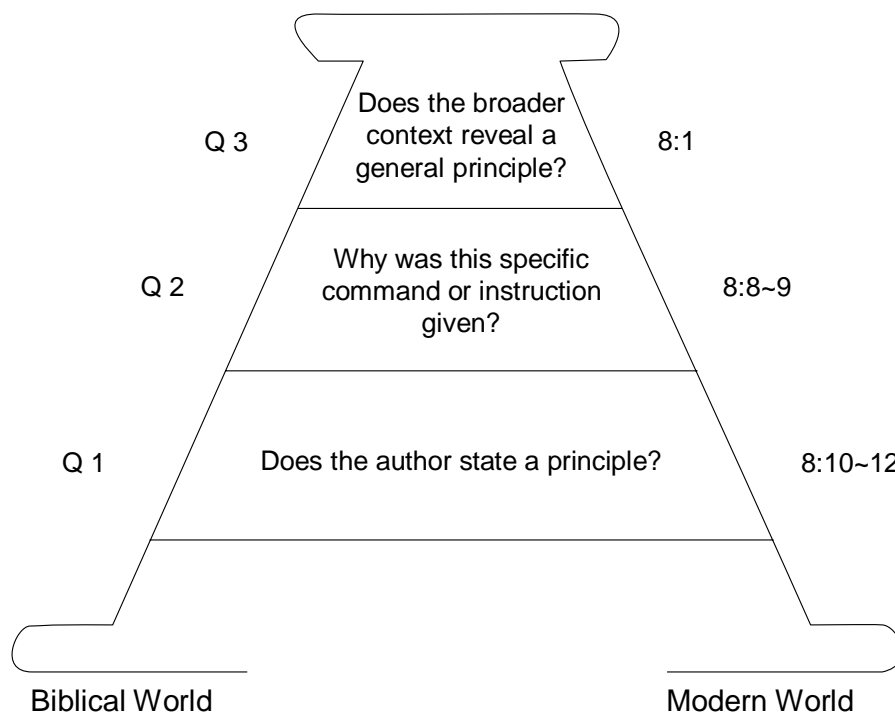


Figure 4.15 Three Questions To Ask

abstracting. The term “ladder of abstraction” was later used by biblical scholars to explain this process of principization.

²¹ William Twining and David Miers, *How to Do Things With Rules* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1976), 45, quoted in Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*, 165; and in Hong, 48.

²² Kuhatschek, 54-57.

²³ *Ibid.*, 57-61.

Defining Abstraction

Webb describes the abstraction process aptly:

The principle underlying a text relates to the degree of abstraction needed to cross between two worlds in the application process. When discovering the underlying principle, some refer to the helpful concept of a ‘ladder of abstraction’: along a continuum highly abstracted ideas are found at the top of the ladder, while more concrete expressions are found at the bottom. One could ‘principle-ize’ *any* text with the highest level of abstraction, “Glorify God.” Yet how high one climbs on the ladder of abstraction to form a principle depends upon the *similarities* and the *differences* between the ancient and modern worlds. Differences push one up the ladder, similarities push one down.²⁴

Example 7: “Do not glean from every corner of the field”²⁵

Objective: To illustrate the ladder of abstraction (figure 4.16)

Scripture: Leviticus 19:9-10

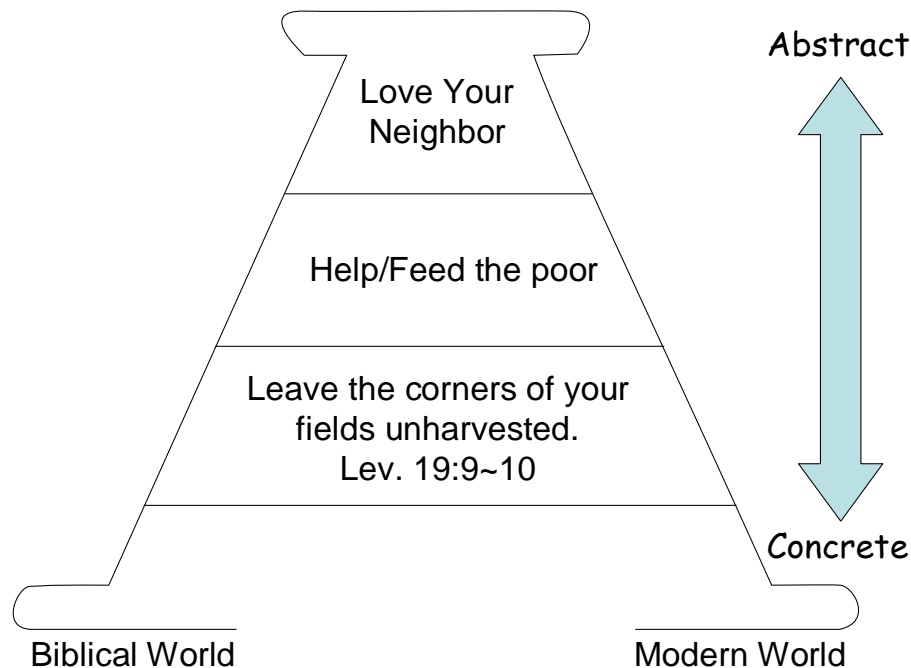


Figure 4.16 From Concrete To Abstract

²⁴ Webb, 53-54. *Italics are the author's.*

²⁵ This example is modified from an example given in Webb, 210.

Jesus applied this process of generalization. An expert in the Law once asked Jesus, “Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied, “‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire Law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”²⁶ From the 613 individual commandments of His day²⁷ and of all the commandments in the Old Testament, Jesus generalized them into two. “These two commandments were so general that they could apply to many different situations—in fact, they could apply to every situation. They expressed the inner motive and ultimate goal of every law given by God.”²⁸ Jesus demonstrated that all the Law can be generalized up the ladder of abstraction. He generalized them into loving God and loving our neighbors.²⁹ See figure 4.17.

²⁶ Matthew 22:37-40, *NLT*.

²⁷ According to the rabbinic tradition of the first century, there were 613 biblical commands revealed to Moses at Mt. Sinai. Preachers can find a summary of these 613 commands from H. L. Willmington, *Willington's Guide to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1982), 940-948.

²⁸ Kuhatschek, 53. The “law” here refers to the Old Testament Law. These two commandments do not exhaust the meaning of Scripture, which includes the New Testament. See also Kuhatschek, 160 (endnote 2).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 54. Cf. James B. Jordan, *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), 21-23. Jordan saw four levels of generality and particularity from the Old Testament: (1) love God, (2) love your neighbor as yourself, (3) the Ten Commandments, and (4) case laws that relate to one or more of the Ten Commandments.

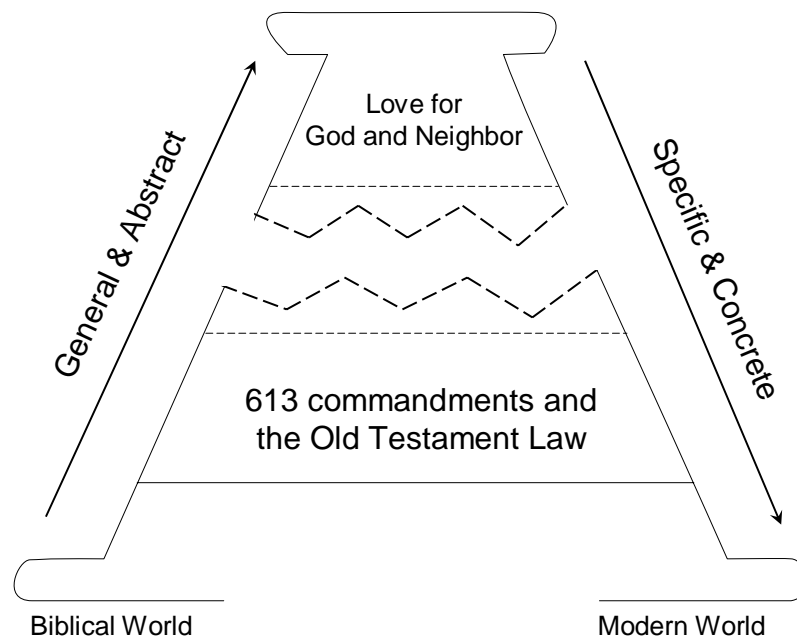


Figure 4.17 Jesus Abstracted The Law

The New Testament authors must have had a similar concept in mind when Peter and Paul indicated that immorality, impurity, and greed constitute idolatrous behavior (Eph. 5:5; Col 3:5; 1 Pet. 4:3; cf. 1 Cor. 5:10, 6:9). In its historical setting, when the Second Commandment “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth” was given (Exod. 20:4), it was addressing religious syncretism, or the worship of pagan deities. Yet Paul expanded the application of this commandment to a “higher” principle, that the sin of idolatry is giving anything or anyone a higher priority than God Himself. John even summarized his entire discussion concerning the things of God and things of this world by asking his readers to “guard yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

By that he meant “not to love the world or the things of the world” (1 John 2:15).³⁰ See figure 4.18.

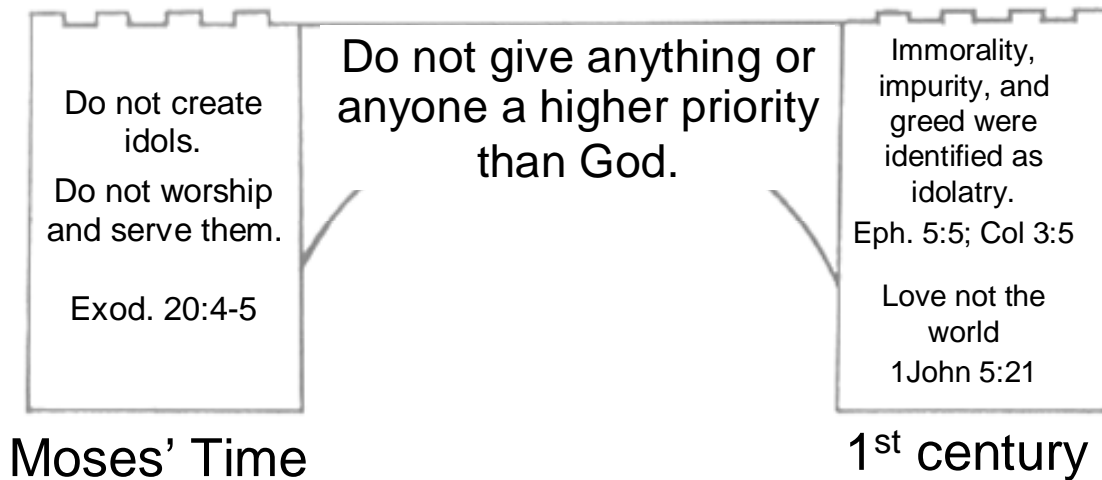


Figure 4.18 Principled Idolatry

How to Abstract?

Abstraction is looking for the analogies among things and events. Figure 4.19 illustrates how things can be abstracted to some common degree. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 on pages 141 and 142 further illustrate how the ladder of abstraction can be applied to a biblical text.

³⁰ See Douglas A. Oss, “Canon as Context: The Function of Sensus Plenior in Evangelical Hermeneutics.” *Grace Theological Journal* 9:1 (Spring 1988): 126-27.

Ladder of Abstraction

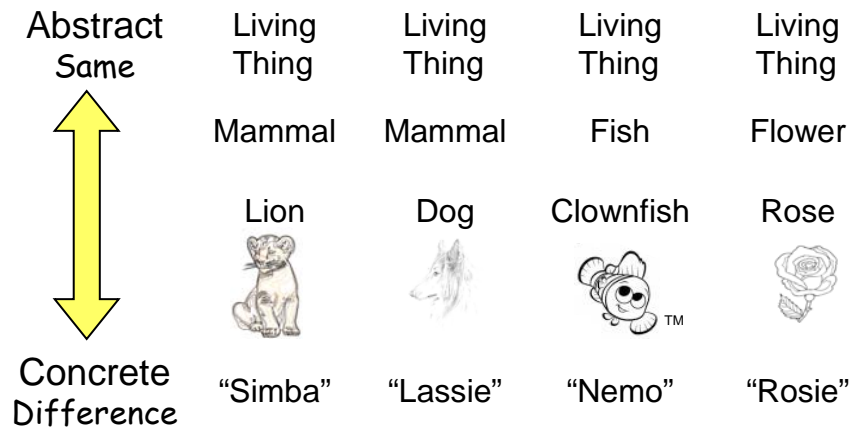


Figure 4.19 Ladder Of Abstraction II

In preaching, abstraction is based on elements the contemporary audience shares with the biblical audience.³¹ When a passage does not directly apply to the immediate audience, preachers can move up the ladder of abstraction to a less specific principle. Then they can move down the ladder of abstraction to the specific situation of their audience. This principle reflects the theological intent of the text to guide the action of the contemporary audience. Finding this principle is both an art and a science. It is an art because there is no absolute way that one can follow to make sure one will get to the right result. There is always a certain degree of subjectivity on the preacher's part in abstracting the principle and applying it to the audience. It is also a science because there are enough studies and guiding disciplines that preachers can follow in order to link the text with their audience. Failure to observe these well-established guiding disciplines

³¹ Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 283-4.

will result in less than authoritative messages.³² It is easier to recognize a principle that is out of line than to “prove” a principle that is within the line.

Asking Why’s

As a way to abstract, preachers can move up the ladder by asking ‘why’s’ and move down by asking “how’s.”³³ Looking back at Example 6, another way of looking at the generalizing process is represented in figure 4.20. Preachers can move up the ladder of abstraction by asking “Why’s.”

³² Chapell called these “be like,” “be good,” and “be disciplined” messages in “Recognizing Nonredemptive Messages” in *Christ-Centered Preaching* (2001), 280-84. Greidanus pointed out these improper ways as “allegorizing,” “spiritualizing,” “imitating Bible characters,” and “moralizing” in “Improper Ways of Bridging the Gap” in *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 159-66. T. S. Warren identified them as eight “preaching pathologies:” “Exegetical Commentary Pathology,” “Bible Concordance Pathology,” “The Historical Pathology,” “Theological Lecture Pathology,” “Existential Devotional Pathology,” “Didactic Discourse Pathology,” “Moralistic Talks Pathology,” and “Homiletical Sham Pathology.” See T. S. Warren, (notes from DM455 *Preaching Topical Expository Sermons*, (Dallas Theological Seminary, Winter 2007). Also cf. Timothy S. Warren, “Mind the Gap,” *Preaching Magazine* 13:2 (September-October 1997): 18-22.

³³ I am indebted to S.G. Isaksen, K.B. Dorval, & D. J. Treffinger in *Creative Approaches to Problem Solving* (Dubuque, IA: Kendell/Hunt Publishing Company, 1994) for this idea of moving up and down the ladder of abstraction.

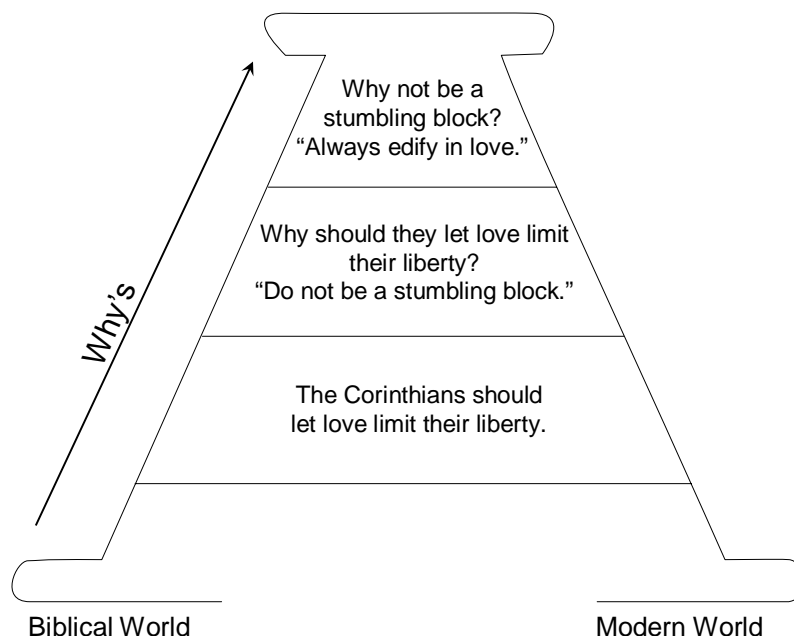


Figure 4.20 Asking Why's

Kaiser applied this abstracting method to Old Testament case laws:

We can translate the particularity, say of the case laws, to the generality of middle axioms or universal principles by observing the morality and theology that undergirds or informs each law. Such informing, or undergirding, theology and moral law can be found:

- a. by noting if a theological or moral *reason* is explicitly given either with the special case law or in the context of similar laws found in that section;
- b. by observing if direct *citations*, indirect *allusions*, or historical references are made to incidents or teachings that had occurred earlier in the Scriptures and prior to the time when this legislation was given;
- c. by comparing this text by *analogy* with a similar text where the same conditions and problems exist but where, because of the context, the informing theology, or clearer dependence on moral law and theology, the solution suggests itself more easily; and
- d. by using the principle of legitimate *inference* or implication to extend what is written into a series of parallel commands, where the moral or theological grounds for what is written and what is inferred remain the same.³⁴

³⁴ Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*, 159. *Italics are the author's.* Kaiser illustrates his method of abstracting with the degrees of affinity (i.e., degrees of relationship) prohibited in marriage (Leviticus 18) and how it relates back to the Ten Commandments and other Old Testament case laws, (159-63).

Looking for the Vision of God and Depravity Factor

Example 8: God instructed Noah to build an ark.

Objective: To demonstrate the necessity of choosing the “right elements” in making analogies while climbing the ladder of abstraction.

Scripture: Genesis 6:9-22

Interpretation: When the Lord saw that the earth had become corrupt and full of violence, He told Noah that He was going to bring floodwaters upon the earth to destroy all the life upon it. However, He would preserve the lives of Noah and his family to establish a new world after the flood. Towards that end, God gave Noah detailed instructions that he was to follow in building an ark and in entering into it. “Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did” (Gen. 6:22). Eventually Noah and his family were the only ones saved from the flood.

Analysis: In later canonical books, Noah was commended for his righteousness (Ezek. 14:14, 20; 2 Pet. 2:5) and his faith (Heb. 11:7). Using the construction of the ark as an object lesson, he warned the people for 120 years of the impending flood.³⁵ Possibly he and his family had to endure ridicule and teasing for building this ark in the middle of dry land. There are also reasons to believe that before Noah’s time there was no rain (cf. Gen. 2:6).³⁶ Although he was faced with many obstacles, Noah did according to what he was commanded. Noah demonstrated his faith through committing his family and himself to

³⁵ T. C. Mitchell, “Noah,” *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J.D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 891.

³⁶ For more scientific discussion on this possibility, refer to Walt Brown, “Did it Rain Before the Flood?” in *In the Beginning: Compelling Evidence for Creation and the Flood* (Phoenix, AZ: Center for Scientific Creation, 2001), 251-52.

build the ark even in the midst of obstacles and difficulties. In a nutshell, Noah's faith is summarized in Hebrew 11:7: "By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." See figure 4.21 below.

Noah's Faith	
Foundation	God's word (warning from God)
Essence	Things not yet seen
Motivation	In reverence
Action	Built an ark
Testimony	Condemned the world
Rewards	Saved his family and became an heir of righteousness

Figure 4.21 Noah's Faith

Principle: Faithfulness to a God-given task, even in the midst of obstacles and difficulties, will result in blessing.

Application: A young, aspiring Christian engineer who is called to the Gospel ministry faces many obstacles and unknowns. God has laid a burden in his heart to pioneer and shepherd an inner city church. To prepare himself, he quits his well-paid, secure job and enters the seminary. He is immediately ridiculed by his parents and relatives. He has to come up with the finances for his family for the next four years. He struggles with the unknowns such as whether his wife can secure a job after relocation, how his children will adjust to a new inner city setting where the seminary is located, or what trials his

future livelihood may bring upon his family in completing his seminary education. In the midst of obstacles and unknowns, the young engineer commits his family and himself to pioneer and shepherd an inner city church. Throughout his seminary training and different phases of his inner city ministry, regardless of the obstacles, he can draw from Noah's faith. He can be encouraged in knowing that his faithfulness will ultimately yield blessing. See figure 4.22.

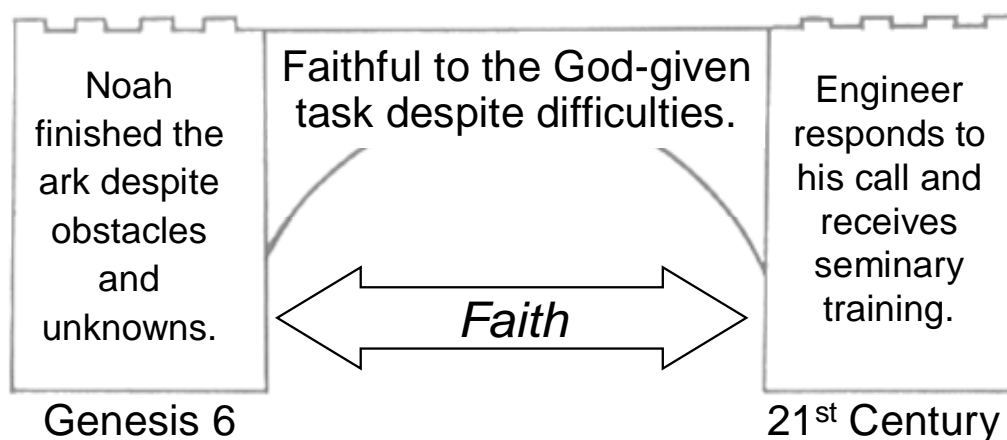


Figure 4.22 Transferring The Faith Element

The above example draws upon a common element essential to both Noah and the contemporary audience. This element can be identified as "faith." Figure 4.23 traces the argument of how the principle is derived.

Noah	The Young Engineer
God called Noah to build an ark.	God calls the young engineer to minister to the inner city.
Noah is faithful in building the ark in the midst of ridicule and unknowns.	The engineer continues his seminary training in the midst of ridicule and unknowns.
Noah demonstrated his faith by finishing the ark.	The engineer can draw on Noah's faith in finishing his seminary training.
By faith through obedience, Noah was blessed.	By faith through obedience, the young engineer will be blessed.

Figure 4.23 Noah and The Young Engineer

From this passage, it would be rare to find a preacher ready to charge his congregation with the command that God wants them to build an ark. Yet, by choosing the wrong common elements a sermon can be prepared that diverts attention from the true intention of the passage. Using this same passage in Genesis, a preacher may preach a message to motivate his congregation to begin a church building project. In this case, the preacher is drawing upon another element common to Noah and the contemporary audience. This time, the common element is the “project,” and the principle is: “God commands us to build.” See figures 4.24 and 4.25.

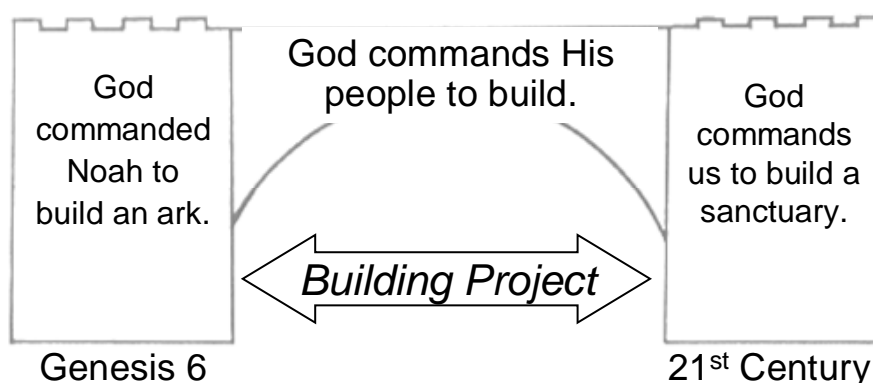


Figure 4.24 Transferring The Wrong Element

The Ark	Church Sanctuary
Building the Ark is an enormous task.	Building a sanctuary is also an enormous task.
The Ark is an instrument to salvation.	A sanctuary is also an instrument to salvation.
God commanded Noah to build the Ark.	God commands us to build a sanctuary.
By faith, Noah obeyed and was blessed.	We should also obey in faith and build a sanctuary.

Figure 4.25 Noah's Ark and the Church Sanctuary

Following the argument of figure 4.25, one can also add that since “without the ark, none can be saved,” then “without the sanctuary, no one can be saved.” No wonder a cynical congregation reasons back with, “Since only Noah’s family was involved in the building of the ark, Preacher, only your family should be involved in building this sanctuary!” Though the idea is without merit, the abstraction method the congregation employed is identical to the one that the preacher used. They both took the

wrong common elements in their principlizing process. Kaiser warned about such an abuse:

There are enormous possibilities for abuse of such a system of interpretation that lays heavy emphasis on a ladder of abstraction, analogy, and the search for undergirding principle. For example, one might wrongly declare that two cases (an ancient situation and a modern situation) were similar just because the factual similarities appeared to be numerous, yet the underlying moral and theological differences between the two could be so great as to overrule any apparent analogies. Contrariwise, there may be situations where the factual correspondences between the ancient and modern situation are negligible, but the differences in the moral and theological underpinnings are small or even nonexistent.³⁷

Abstracting the wrong elements leads to erroneous application. So the question remains, “What common elements should one abstract in principization?”³⁸

Robinson employs two questions in his abstraction: (1) what is the vision of God, and (2) what is the depravity factor--what in humanity rebels against that vision of God?³⁹ “These two questions are a helpful clue in application because God remains the same, and human depravity remains the same. Our depravity may look different, but it’s the same pride, obstinacy, disobedience.”⁴⁰ See figure 4.26. The vision of God breaks down into two aspects: what does God want from us and how do we see God?

³⁷ Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*, 164-65. To prevent either of these situations from happening, the next section will cover the horizontal movement in this theological principization process.

³⁸ In the next session, “Horizontal Movement,” I will discuss in more details about safeguarding these common elements.

³⁹ Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 23, 24. Though Robinson asks these two questions in identifying the analogous elements from the Old Testament narratives, they are equally applicable in other literary forms as well.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 24.

Climb by asking:

1. What does this teach about God?
2. What does this teach about human nature?

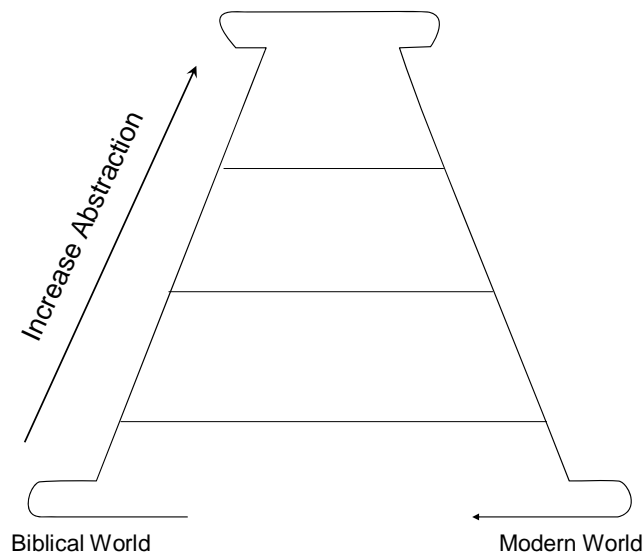


Figure 4.26 Abstracting Up: Look For The Vision of God

Referring back to Example 6 (Eating food sacrificed to idols),⁴¹ Robinson asserts:

The vision of God: He is our redeemer. Therefore, Paul argues, I will not eat meat, because if I wound my brother's weak conscience, I sin against Christ, who redeemed him. . . . The depravity factor: People want their rights, so they don't care that Christ died for their brother.⁴²

This “depravity factor” directs attention to what the Scriptures expose as sin, and what God does to redeem man from that problem. It need “not be something for which we are culpable. It simply needs to be an aspect of the human condition that requires the instruction, admonition, and/or comfort of Scripture.”⁴³ Robinson’s

⁴¹ See pages 92-93.

⁴² Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 24.

⁴³ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (2001), 43.

“depravity factor” is similar to what Chapell calls the “Fallen Condition Focus (FCF),” which “is the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those for or by whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage to manifest God's glory in his people.”⁴⁴

In Example 8 (Gen. 6:9-22)⁴⁵ above, “corruption (6:11, 12),” “violence (6:11, 13),” and “under God’s wrath (6:13, 17),” are all possible “depravity factors” that the contemporary audience can share with those in Noah’s time. They reflect the human, fallen condition. But depravity factors need not be restrictively defined as those attitudes and actions that rebel against God or the vision of God, but they also include human attempts to please God. Such attempts are depravity factors because humans are fallible, their own strength and efforts deficient, in trying to do only what the Holy Spirit can do in them and for them. Hence, “righteousness (6:9),” “blamelessness (6:9),” “walking with God (6:9),” “faith to obey God’s command (6:14, 22),” and “receiving God’s grace and mercy (6:18-21)” are equally valid “depravity factors.” On the other hand, “building project” or “the act of building” is not a “depravity factor.” By itself, it does not reflect any human fallen condition nor God’s redeeming grace. In identifying the “depravity factor,” it is safe to look for the one that carries the prominent authorial intent. In Example 8, “faith” or “the lack of faith” is a prominent “depravity factor” while “forgiveness” is not.

Referring back to the ladder of abstraction, preachers can move up and down the ladder by:

⁴⁴ Ibid., 42. See also Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (2001), 40-44; 201-03; 231-33, 291.

⁴⁵ See pages 102-106.

1. Looking for the “depravity factor” in the biblical text. What fallen condition was the Scripture addressing to the original audience in their historical context? Fear? Alienation? Immorality? Dishonesty? Lack of faith? Lack of hope? Lack of love?
2. Asking how their contemporary audiences share in that same fallen condition. What do they have in common with those in the text?
3. Looking for the “vision of God.” How is God portrayed? How does He express His grace and love to His people then and now?

Preachers must look beyond the superficial and try to understand the heart and mind of the biblical characters behind their actions by asking “why.” Linking the “depravity factor” with the value of asking “why’s,” Lowery explains:

It is not enough to probe the question of *what* the text is saying. It is equally important to discover *why* it is saying what it says. The question of *why* is most often the context for the transition into homiletical form. . . . Every explicit theme presumes an implicit problem. . . . In the tension produced by the interaction of these ingredients, sermons are born.⁴⁶

According to Lowery, asking “why?” enables preachers to discover the “depravity factor” of a given text and can help them introduce the “vision of God” either in the form of God’s grace or wrath later in the sermon.

Limits on the Ladder of Abstraction

How high should a text climb? The level of abstraction should be just high enough that it is relevant to the contemporary audience and low enough to maintain and carry the uniqueness and redemptive significance of the biblical text. In bringing the text across to the sermon, it can not be presumed that the higher the level of abstraction, the

⁴⁶ Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 20. *Italics are the author’s.*

better the sermon. The process of principlization is only necessary when the biblical text does not lend itself to direct application to the contemporary audience.

Some passages can be applied directly “without climbing the Ladder of Abstraction because the biblical context is already analogous to the contemporary setting.”⁴⁷ The command to “Love your wife” (Eph. 5:25, 28, 33) is readily relevant to the biblical audience as well as to the contemporary audience.

Jones provides three criteria in identifying these directly-applied passages he labels as “sidewalk” passages: (1) these passages address universal sins; (2) these passages reveal universal theology; and (3) these passages have immediate cultural parallels.⁴⁸ In identifying them, Jones came up with these three questions: (1) does it reveal truth about God in ways that are immediately parallel to modern life; (2) does it expose human sinfulness in the original audience that still exists in the same way in the preacher’s life and the lives of people in his church; and, (3) does the author communicate in terms that are appropriate only for his culture or for every culture?⁴⁹

Freeman offers insight in identifying those biblical texts that are given in principle form.

... if you find essentially the same thing being said in different strata of biblical literature covering different time frames and different historical situations, the very fact that what is said has been constant probably indicates that it is a principle. It is a constant that has survived all the variables. In this case you don’t need to “principlize” the text.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 22.

⁴⁸ Jones, “Application in Biblical Preaching,” 62-5.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁰ Freeman, *Variety in Biblical Preaching*, 42.

When the biblical text is given in principle form, this does not mean, in application, that preachers do not have to move down the ladder of abstraction to the contemporary audience. “Love your wife” is clearly a principle that contemporary audiences find relevant. However, to put this principle into action, a husband has to move down the ladder and decide whether to wash the dishes, take his wife out for dinner, buy her a diamond ring, or all of the above.

On the other hand, some biblical texts, though given in principle form, still have to climb the ladder of abstraction in order to stay relevant to the contemporary audience. “Do not provoke your children to anger” (Eph. 6:4a) may have to climb up the ladder when the contemporary audience is a group of career singles. Jesus generalized “You shall not murder” (Matt. 5:21-26) when He spoke to a group of people who might not have been contemplating any murder at all.

Example 9: “You shall not murder.” (Exod. 20:13; Deut. 5:17; Matt. 5:21; 19:19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Rom. 13:9; Jas. 2:11)

Objective: To show how Jesus applied (climbed up) the ladder of abstraction to make the biblical text relevant to His audience.

Scripture: Matthew 5:21-26

Interpretation: Jesus quoted the Fifth Commandment from the Law and applied it to three different situations of His audience. To those who passed judgment on others, He told them not to call their brother, “Raca (fool)” (5:22). To those who harbored bitter feelings towards another, He told them to reconcile their grievances with their brother before bringing a gift to the altar (5:23-24). And lastly, to those who had disputes with

others, He told them to reach an agreement with their accuser to avoid imprisonment (5:25-26).

Analysis: In telling His audience not to call another “Raca,” Jesus explains the true intent of the Fifth Commandment. God was not simply commanding His people not to murder. Rather, He was commanding them to avoid becoming so angry that they begin to harbor thoughts of murder in their minds. Jesus’ principlizing of the Fifth Commandment was especially applicable to the Pharisees, who, while feeling righteous for not committing murder, would soon become so angry with Jesus that they would plot His murder.

Application: Though “You shall not murder” is in principle form, Jesus moved up the ladder of abstraction and generalized the command to “Do not be angry with each other or you will be judged.” (Matt. 5:22) and then moved down the ladder of abstraction to the three specific situations of His audience. See figure 4.27.

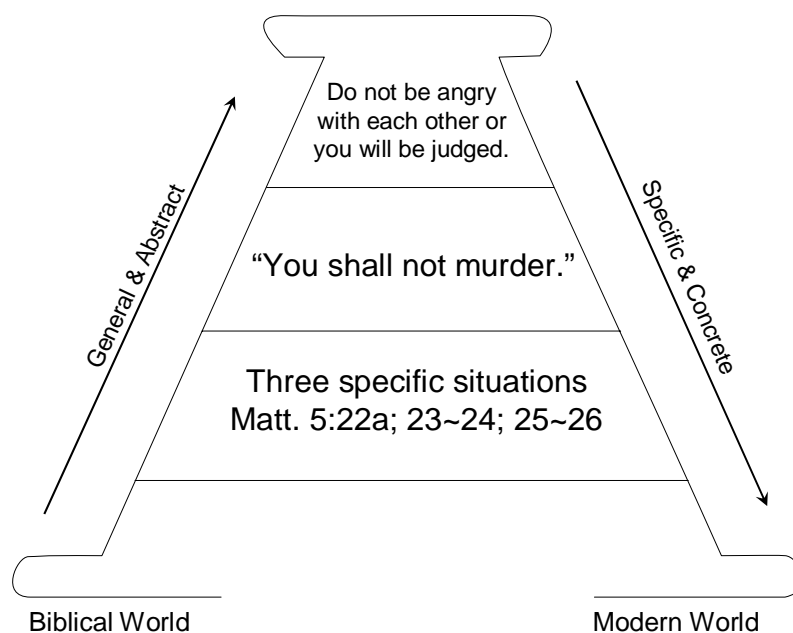


Figure 4.27 Jesus Abstracting Up

The biblical text climbs up the ladder because there is a mismatch. Either (1) the biblical text itself was given in non-principle form⁵¹ or (2) the contemporary situation does not lend an analogous situation for immediate relevancy.

Sometimes the text has to climb the ladder until it reaches its intent. In this case, preachers ask, “Why did the biblical author write this text? What purpose did God want to accomplish with the biblical audience?”

Example 10: “Do not muzzle an ox.”⁵²

Objective: Abstracting up to the author’s intent.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 25:4; 1 Corinthians 9:9

Interpretation: Old Testament law forbids farmers from muzzling an ox while it is treading out the grain, allowing the ox to eat the grain on the floor.

Analysis: Contemporary farmers can easily apply this law directly. To a non-farming audience, preachers need to climb up the ladder of abstraction to reach the intent of this prohibition. They must ask not only what the text says, but also why God made this law. The vision of God is one of a just God who is the Provider. The depravity factor can be identified as human selfishness and greediness. These link the biblical text to the contemporary audience.

Principle: The one who works ought to benefit from his labor.

Application: Several New Testament passages representing different situations quote this principle and apply it to Christian workers. Jesus instructed His apostles and

⁵¹ Freeman calls this “particularization” (*Variety in Biblical Preaching*, 42). Bob Deffinbaugh calls it “precept.” “The Sabbath Controversy in the Gospels,” in *Exodus: The Birth of the Nation* page 16, (n.d.) http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=149 (accessed August 31, 2006).

⁵² See also page 24.

disciples to depend on those to whom they ministered for their livelihood (Matt. 10:10; Luke 10:7); Paul defended his own right to be remunerated (1 Cor. 9:9); and Paul instructed Timothy that elders were worthy of “double honor” (1 Tim. 5:17-18).

Beware of over abstraction

In abstracting, avoid climbing so far up that all texts become distilled to the same message and become too remote for the contemporary audience. “Faith in God’s sovereign position and power evokes forgiveness” is better than “Faith forgives” (Gen. 50:15-21). “Love for a fellow believer limits the Christian’s expression of liberty in Christ” is better than “Love limits liberty” (1 Cor. 10:14-33).⁵³

“Principles must not be so general and so all-embracing that they give very little guidance in dealing with specific applications.”⁵⁴ If a preacher takes the story of Jonah, the Sermon on the Mount, and the book of Philemon and preaches, “God provides,”⁵⁵ such an over-abstracted statement will not only lessen the theological uniqueness of each text, it also lacks the specificity to “breed interest and power by demonstrating that the Scriptures speak to real concerns.”⁵⁶

⁵³ Timothy S. Warren, “The Theological Process,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156: 623 (July-September 1999): 349. See other examples in Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (2001), 42.

⁵⁴ Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*, 157.

⁵⁵ Examples cited are from Richard, *Scripture Sculpture*, 165.

⁵⁶ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (2001), 42-3.

Certainty of Authority

In climbing up the ladder of abstraction, preachers aim at a “Thus-says-the-Lord” authority. But in stepping down to the specific, each application has its own degree of authority and certainty.

Robinson identifies five types of implications from the text: (1) necessary, (2) probable, (3) possible, (4) improbable, and (5) impossible.

... a *necessary* implication of “You shall not commit adultery” is you cannot have a sexual relationship with a person who is not your spouse. A *probable* implication is you ought to be very careful of strong bonding friendships with a person who is not your spouse. A *possible* implication is you ought not travel regularly to conventions or other places with a person who is not your spouse. An *improbable* conclusion is you should not at any time have lunch with someone who is not your spouse. An *impossible* implication is you ought not have dinner with another couple because you are at the same table with a person who is not your spouse.⁵⁷

To Robinson, only the *necessary* implications carry the authority of “Thus says the Lord.” Preachers do not have the same level of authority for dictating to their audiences exactly how they must implement a principle into their own lives. It is at that point that the work of the Holy Spirit comes into play in how the contemporary audience responds to the message. When a specific application is given with the force or authority of a principle, it becomes legalism. Robinson gives this example:

If I’m preaching about how husbands are to love their wives, and say, “If you really love your wife, send her flowers.” And if I make sending your wife flowers equal to the principle of loving your wife, that becomes legalism. Your wife might actually prefer dinner out.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 25-26. *Italics are the author’s*. See also Richard, “Levels of Biblical Meaning,” 126-29. Richard delineated three levels of meanings from the text for life responses: statement, implication, and extrapolation.

⁵⁸ “In Conversation with Dr. Haddon Robinson,” ed. Connection Staff, (Tyndale Seminary, posted June 25, 2004), <http://www.tyndale.ca/articles/robinson.php> (accessed December 2, 2006).

Session Three: Horizontal Movement: Keeping the Theology

Application must come from the theological purpose of the biblical author.⁵⁹

Preachers need to understand not only what the text says, but also why it was written and what it did to the biblical audience. Their “goal is to identify what the writer of the text in question regarded as truth from his particular historical/theological perspective.”⁶⁰

Validating the Principles

The horizontal movement is the overarching theological control of the entire principlizing process. It identifies the theological purpose of a biblical text and then retains it throughout the process of principlization. It is the theological pulse of the principlization, without which “more heresy is preached in application than in Bible exegesis.”⁶¹ Without this theological anchor, preachers may construct misleading principles like: “Four Proven Steps of Witnessing” from Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan Woman (John 4:7-26); “Rely upon God to overcome your biggest obstacle” from the David and Goliath story (1 Sam. 17); or, “Invite Jesus into your life to organize your life” from Jesus’ calming the storm (Mark 4:35-41).⁶² Most conservative preachers

⁵⁹ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (2001), 88. There have been discussions among biblical scholars concerning the role between the intent of the author and the intent of the Divine Author. It is the position of this seminar that the meaning of the biblical text is limited by the author’s intent, yet the application of the text is limited by the Authorial intent. For a brief summary of different views of the subject, see Darren R. Middleton, “Divine Meaning and Authorial Intention: Sensus Plenior - A Blessing or Curse for Evangelical Hermeneutics?” *Pressiechurch.org* (n.d.) http://www.pressiechurch.org/Theol_2/divine_meaning_and_authorial_int.htm (accessed June 3, 2005).

⁶⁰ T. S. Warren, “A Paradigm for Preaching,” 476.

⁶¹ Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 20.

⁶² Richard warns of Principlization without theology in his Appendix titled “The Perils of Principlization [sic]” in *Scripture Sculpture*, 163-67. (The book has subsequently been re-titled *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching*.) Richard outlines eleven difficulties for principlization without theological support: (1) it reduces redemptive history to the plane of moral history;

put some theology into their principization, but they mainly let their systematic theology set the boundaries rather than setting them using exegetical theology or biblical theology that highlights the uniqueness of the text. This is a matter of authority.⁶³

The horizontal movement is not separate from the vertical movement. A biblical text can move in both directions, vertical and horizontal, simultaneously. While the vertical movement deals primarily with abstracting the text and specifying the principle, the horizontal movement deals with screening the process theologically, such that only the theological purpose reflecting the Authorial intent makes the journey across the chasm.⁶⁴ The vertical movement is more of method, relevancy, and focus. The horizontal movement is a temporal movement which validates the theology along the way.

These vertical and horizontal movements are presented separately in this seminar for clarity and pedagogical reasons only. In real life, they are intertwined without any sequential steps between them. The hierarchy or sequential steps only exist within each movement respectively.

The theological purpose of a text is best derived from its authorial intent and literary form.⁶⁵

(2) it overlooks the importance and uniqueness of a particular narrative and happening—its factual character; (3) it results in monotony because uniqueness of each and every text is not caught; (4) it limits preaching to the theological abilities and experiential categories of the preacher; (5) it enters the exegetical study hoping to find some analogies between the early audience and recent audience; (6) it basically deals with how to spiritually adjust to this life; (7) it short-circuits the interpretation process by overlooking the discontinuity between the people then and the people today; (8) it puts the preacher in control of what he chooses to exemplify for the audience; (9) it provides for psychological exegesis even without textual warrant; (10) it spiritualizes the text; and (11) it reduces the faith to behavioral morality.

⁶³ See Richard Weaver's Hierarchy of Values on pages 90-91.

⁶⁴ Refer back to the bridge analogy at the beginning of the seminar. See pages 77 and 87.

⁶⁵ There are many techniques and tools one can use in discovering the theological intent of a biblical text. Authorial intent and literary form are the two to start with. In fact, all skills used in exegesis

Identify the Authorial Intent

Robinson suggested five questions to ask in discovering the author's theological purpose:

1. Are there in the text any indications of purpose, editorial comments, or interpretive statements made about the events?
2. Are there any theological judgments made in the text?
3. For narrative passages: Is this story given as an example or warning? If so, in exactly what way? Is this incident a norm or an exception? What limitations should be placed on it?
4. What message was intended for those to whom the revelation was originally given and also for subsequent generations the writer knew would read it?
5. Why would the Holy Spirit have included this account in Scripture?⁶⁶

Preachers can pick up cues about the authorial intent from the response or lack of response of the biblical audience. Communication demands action. When God spoke to the biblical audience, He expected a specific response from them. What was the desired response that God expected from them? What was the setting in which God's Word first came?⁶⁷ These questions can lead to the right answers.

Example 11: The story of infant Jesus

Objective: To demonstrate how the text reflects the authorial intent.

Scripture: Matthew 2

Interpretation: The Magi visited Jesus. This angered Herod and caused him to kill all infants under two. Joseph and his family were forced to flee to Egypt and later moved back to Nazareth.

and hermeneutics are applicable in this principlization process. Preachers need not leave those skills behind once the exegesis is done.

⁶⁶ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (2001), 89-90.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 91.

Analysis: Matthew in his first two chapters succinctly placed Jesus within the framework of Jewish traditions and expectations of the Messiah. In chapter two, Matthew recorded two journeys: the magi from the East (Matt. 2:1-12) and Joseph's family fleeing from Herod (Matt. 2:13-23). What was his authorial intent in recording these two journeys, and what can be learned about the biblical audience's response to His birth?

To answer the first question, Matthew used the story of the magi to show how Jesus' birth fulfilled the messianic Old Testament prophecies (Matt. 2:5, 15, 17, 23; cf. Mic. 5:2; Hos. 11:1; Jer. 31:15; Isa. 40:3).⁶⁸ He also used the story to demonstrate that Jesus is God, the King of the Jews. As God, He received the worship of the magi (2:11). As King, He dethroned the illegitimate king. The title of "King" Herod is dropped after the citation of Micah 5:2 (Matt. 2:5). Herod is symbolically dethroned and is never again called king. In recording the flight to Egypt, Matthew subtly links Jesus with Moses and with the nation Israel. Like Moses, Jesus was the Deliverer God had appointed to deliver His people, and thus His life was sought by the king even in his infancy. As God delivered Moses from Egypt, so He rescued Jesus. Like Israel, Jesus went from the Promised Land to Egypt. Then out of Egypt, He returned to the Promised Land, fulfilling the prophecy: "I called my Son out of Egypt" (Hos. 11:1; cf. 2:15).

In answer to the second question, Jesus was despised and rejected by men, particularly his fellow Jews. There is a great contrast here. In contrast to the magi who received a light from a star and traveled from afar to worship the King, the Jewish religious experts who knew the prophecies about the Messiah, refused to travel even six

⁶⁸ There have been questions about how Matthew 2:23 is a fulfillment of any messianic prophecies. For a concise treatment, see James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of Matthew: an Expositional Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 2001), 42.

miles to seek the King. Herod, a half-Jew, was determined to kill Him. Jesus was despised as He carried the stigma of being a Naorean.⁶⁹ But those who receive Him, even Gentiles like those mentioned in the genealogy and the magi, will be blessed, for the Abrahamic Covenant promised blessing for both Israel and the nations.

Matthew's intent in chapter two was to lay the framework for his book. All the events he recorded were to present Jesus as the Messiah and to show that despite His fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, He was still rejected by the Jewish nation. Knowing this framework guards the theology of the book, preventing erroneous interpretation and application.

Principle: Trust Jesus as the Savior for He is the promised Messiah.

In bringing the biblical text across the chasm to the contemporary audience, preachers need to compare the biblical and modern worlds and ask, "How can the contemporary audience identify with biblical characters?"⁷⁰ Not only should they compare the immediate context and circumstances between the two audiences, but they should also compare the theological/historical settings to which they belong.⁷¹ They should note the continuities and discontinuities between the two. For example,

⁶⁹ Cf. John 1:46. See also Frederick Dale Bruner, *Matthew, a Commentary: The Christbook, Matthew 1-12*, rev. & expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 76-78.

⁷⁰ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (2001), 91.

⁷¹ Cf. Richard, "Application Theory in Relation to the New Testament," 207-210. Also Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*, 157, 164, 165. Kaiser warns against drawing conclusions between the similarities and differences about two audiences without considering them in their theological and historical contexts. See also Daniel J. Estes, "Audience Analysis and Validity in Application," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150: 598 (April-June 1993): 219-29. Estes discusses five principles for valid application: (1) accurate exegesis of both biblical passages and the audience; (2) there is a limitation in terms of application from a Bible text to a specific audience in view; (3) a particular biblical text will have varying degrees of direct transference to varied audiences; (4) the specificity of application is dependent on both the biblical audience and contemporary audience; (5) to be conscious of one's own theological biases so as not to superimpose biases onto the text, and hence skew the application.

Deuteronomy was written to the Israelites, the covenant people, before entering into the Promised Land, to guide them in establishing a theocracy and a social order that would be a testimony to other nations. Although the contemporary audience is not living in a theocratic society, they have received revelation from God and can maintain a covenant relationship with Him just as the Israelites did.⁷²

Looking back at Example 10 (“Do not muzzle an ox”), preachers may abstract a timeless principle: “Compensate and be fair to those whose livelihood depends upon you.” When asked, “What is the author’s intent of this text?” preachers can add an exemplary reason to the application of this case law. To the Israelites, the law was given to guide them in exemplifying God to other nations. To contemporary Christians, commands are given to guide them in exemplifying God to nonbelievers.⁷³

Closely related with the authorial intent is the literary form or genre of a text. They both direct preachers to the theology of a text.

Literary Form Plays a Role

God, through the biblical authors, used all kinds of literary forms to communicate: narrative history, genealogies, chronicles, laws, songs, poetry, proverbs, prophetic oracles, riddles, drama, biographical sketches, parables, letters, sermons, and apocalypses.⁷⁴ Preachers make “interpretative decisions” based upon the literary form

⁷² E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, 248-54. Johnson’s discussion of the role of God’s theological administration now in comparison with then in application is helpful.

⁷³ Cf. Matthew 5:13-16.

⁷⁴ See Fee and Stuart, (1982), 20.

they receive.⁷⁵ For example, one finds different forms in the newspaper—news, features, editorials, obituaries, advertisements—and adjusts one’s interpretation and expectations from each form. If it is a news story, one expects objective facts telling what had happened. If it is an editorial, one expects persuasive arguments about an issue. If it is an advertisement, one expects a certain degree of boasting.

Recognizing the function of literary forms, Fee and Stuart pointed out:

...we need to know *how* a psalm, a form that was often addressed *to God*, functions as God’s Word *to us*, and how psalms differ from the “laws,” which were often addressed to people in cultural situations no longer in existence. *How* do such “laws” speak to us, and how do they differ from the moral “laws,” which are always valid in all circumstances?⁷⁶

These differences require adjustments in distilling the text’s theology.⁷⁷

Warren further commented:

... the theological distance and intricacy of a proverb or epistolary command will pale in comparison to the theological distance and intricacy of an Old Testament cultic requirement. Sometimes the preacher will be able to progress through the theological process as if skipping it entirely, as in the case of, “Do not get drunk with wine,” (Ephesians 5:18). On other occasions the process will prove more long and complex, as in the case of, “And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live’ ” (Numbers 21:8, NRSV).⁷⁸

⁷⁵ See Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, 17-19.

⁷⁶ Fee and Stuart, (1982), 20. *Italics are the author’s.*

⁷⁷ For the special rules that apply to different literary forms (genres), readers can refer to Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993); Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*; and Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*.

⁷⁸ Timothy S. Warren, “The Theological Process,” (unpublished class reading article from the DM455 *Preaching Topical Expository Sermons* class, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX, Winter 2007), 9. This is an updated revision of “The Theological Process in Sermon Preparation,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156: 623 (July-September 1999): 336-56. See also, Timothy S. Warren, “Preaching’s Theological Process,” (unpublished paper presented at the Meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, October 16-19, 1997).

Preaching involves more than determining the meaning of a biblical text. The preacher must also discern the claim that the text makes upon the current life of the community of faith.⁷⁹ By asking, “What is the rhetorical function of this genre?” preachers can anticipate what the literary effects are on the audience. For example, when the literary form is a punch line, the effect on the audience is laughter.⁸⁰

Example 12: Genealogy of Jesus according to Matthew⁸¹

Objective: To show how the rhetorical function of a genre works its way to the authorial intent.

Scripture: Matthew 1:1-17

Interpretation: The genealogy of Jesus is traced down from Abraham right to the beginning of the Gospel. There are three surprises: (1) additional information was provided about certain individuals;⁸² (2) the names were grouped into three sets of fourteen: Abraham to David, David to the exile, and the exile to Jesus; (3) the appearance of four women’s names: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Mary.

Analysis: The biblical audience gained a broader and deeper sense of the identity of Jesus and was invited to make judgments about Him. The names in the genealogy also evoke memories and associations of the full sweep of Israel’s history. The threefold grouping of the list into sets of fourteen gives a sense of overall design and

⁷⁹ Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, 24.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 26.

⁸¹ Ibid., 30-33.

⁸² The genealogy informs us that David was “the king” (verse 6) and that Jechoniah had brothers and lived “at the time of the deportation to Babylon.” (verse 11).

is “according to an overarching plan that is purposeful from beginning to end.”⁸³ The women on the list were there to show that although “this overall design does not take the form of a straight path: there were twists and detours along the genealogical road from Abraham to Jesus,”⁸⁴ God’s promise is not altered. Summing up, Long wrote:

... its rhetorical effect is to say, “Let me introduce you to Jesus the Christ, the one who, by the design of God, is the inheritor of David’s kingship and the fullness of Israel’s history, but in ways which will surprise and trouble you. Listen now to his story. . . .”⁸⁵

Principle: Acknowledge and submit to God’s design even though it is not always a straight path.

Example 13: Creation Account

Objective: To show how literary form and authorial intent give us the theological purpose of a text.

Scripture: Genesis 1

Interpretation: In six days, God created the universe. In His own image, He created male and female.

Analysis: When Moses wrote Genesis, the Israelites were, after 40 years of wandering, on the cusp of the land promised by God, land that was still occupied by other nations who did not want them to be there. The Israelites had heard of how they had been delivered from the powerful nation of Egypt and had been told of the amazing things God had done for their older generation. But they had not

⁸³ Ibid., 33.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

experienced such blessings themselves. They were confused about their identity and their relationship with this covenant God. “Who is this God? If He is God, why have all these things happened to us?” they might have asked. And God answered these questions in Genesis 1. He told them who He is and therefore who they were. He told them that He created everything, even human life, out of nothing. In fact, He gave the Israelites the authority to conquer the Promised Land and even to annihilate the Canaanites. Though conservatives believe the historicity of the Scripture, Genesis is not a book concerned about scientific precision, but a book concerned about God and his people.

Principle: God is our Creator and the Bestower of our blessings.⁸⁶

Application: In like manner, contemporary Christians, at times, are confused about who God is and His relationship with them, especially when the circumstances do not reflect what He has promised. It is at those times Genesis 1 speaks to their condition.

Conclusion

The theological principlization process is a two-movement process. It bridges the chasm between the biblical text and the contemporary audience. When preachers utilize this process in their sermon preparation or personal studies, they will follow “after God’s heart” in their application of the Scriptures.

⁸⁶ Ibid. According to Long, a preacher is, “not to replicate the text but to regenerate the impact of. . .that text. . .attempt to say and do what. . .the text *now* says and does for a new and unique set of people.” *Italics are the author’s.*

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

The Seminar

Design of the Seminar

The seminar material presented in chapter four is the result of many trials and errors. When I first approached the project in March 2006, I thought of pastors who were as eager to learn the process of theological principization as I was. Encouraged by the results of my survey with the Doctor of Ministry cohort,¹ I pictured the participants to be pastors with several years of experience who had finished formal theological training and had mastered the basic skills in homiletics.

Then, in September 2006, after presenting the possibility of such a seminar to a small group of pastors² in the Sacramento area, I sensed an overall apathy to the subject of sermon application or even to the concept of upgrading one's preaching skills. With this newfound information, I reasoned that pastors have to recognize the following before they will attend such a seminar:

¹ Please refer to footnote #9 in chapter 1 on page 3. These are a group of motivated Doctor of Ministry students mainly from North America who are pursuing their preaching degrees under Dr. Haddon W. Robinson with Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. The survey result showed that they are not up-to-date in their knowledge of recent developments in the abstraction of sermon application and are ready to benefit from what I am going to prepare.

² Ten Asian pastors around Sacramento area gathered together on September 20, 2006. Nine surveys were passed out, and only three were returned. The result was lackluster. They are a group of experienced pastors. The least experienced among them has five years of pastoral experience. The most senior is of retiring age. They have spent an average of twenty years in ministry.

1. They must see the significance of their preaching ministry in the context of their ministry setting.
2. They must believe in expository preaching and the necessity of application.
3. They must see a need to improve their preaching skills.
4. They must want to help their congregations reach another level in their application of Scripture.
5. They must be convinced that I am able to offer them something that will improve their preaching skills.

Moreover, in marketing such a seminar, I came to realize that I need to first of all, boost my own credibility in this area of study by gaining experience and practice in the process of theological principlization. Secondly, I need to demonstrate that theological principlization effects spiritual growth. With experience and congregational testimony, I hope to raise pastoral awareness of the need to upgrade their applicational skills and motivate them to attend a seminar to address that need. However, time is not on my side to get all these pieces in place for this seminar. Therefore, I have adjusted my original plan (approach) in two areas: (1) resolve to field test it and get feedback from seminary students and existing continuing education pastors, and (2) scale back the academic level of the targeted participants.

Why am I scaling back my seminar? I think I was aiming too high and expecting too much. The following realizations led me to such a decision:

1. The need for such a seminar is there, but pastors I have come into contact with may not feel the need. Extra time and relationship-building needs to be there before pastors reach a similar conviction.

2. Reflecting upon my own theological upbringing, I have been burdened about the subject for many years. I cannot expect other preachers to share the same or similar passion.
 - a. I was trained under the teaching of Haddon W. Robinson, an advocate of authoritative application. All the three adjunct faculties during my Doctor of Ministry track at Gordon-Conwell were my homiletics and pedagogy professors while I was pursuing my Master in Theology degree at Dallas Theological Seminary.³ I have been well-exposed to their philosophy and theology of how to handle the Scriptures with authority. During the last days of our third residency, at an informal dinner, a classmate shared with the group how “wrong” his preaching had been before taking the Doctor of Ministry course and how he had changed in his approach toward preaching now. He then turned to me and asked how the class had changed my preaching approach. I replied, “In terms of approach, not much because three years after I was saved, I was in seminary. At that time, I had no preaching experience, nor any desire to be skilled in this area. All three adjunct professors were my professors in Dallas. I absorbed what they taught me then. This is the only way to which I have been taught and exposed. Of course, after twenty plus years of ministerial experience, I have a greater appreciation and comprehension of what they have been talking about.”
 - b. Application has always been my favorite pursuit. It has been in my blood for the past twenty-five plus years since seminary. I have taught six Sunday school

³ Duane A. Litfin, Donald Sunukjian, and Sid Buzzell taught me between 1979 and 1982 while I attended Dallas Theological Seminary. Litfin and Sunukjian were both proteges of Robinson before teaching at Dallas.

classes and written a booklet on the subject. Of course, the Doctor of Ministry program and this thesis further kindled that passion.

3. Theological principlization is not an entry level homiletic skill. During our third residency, one of the assignments was to prepare and teach a session for first year homiletic students. Each participant was assigned to teach the cohort a session about a major step in expository preaching. One of my fellow cohorts was responsible for the session “Moving from the Text to the Sermon,” and he taught the mediate step of the timeless theological principle. He struggled in presenting the materials, and Robinson commented afterward that he would not teach first year homiletic students the process of deriving timeless theological principles. He said that it was a difficult subject to grasp.
4. Theological principlization is not a well-known skill even among theological circles. On one occasion I asked a colleague who graduated with a MABS degree from a well-known seminary in the 1980’s how to translate the Ladder of Abstraction into Chinese. This colleague astonished me by saying that she had never heard about the term and did not know what it was until I explained to her.

With these realizations, I have scaled back the technical side of the seminar and have added more weight on the conviction level. I have expanded the “why” of principlization and the advantages of principlization significantly.

Rationale Behind the Design

Pastors are busy people. In general, they want to do a good job in applying the Scriptures, but not all of them are able to afford the time or finances for further seminar training once they have graduated. An eight-hour seminar in any combination of

format⁴ may be the most effective use of time and cost-effective way in equipping them with the process of principlization.

With this in mind, I have divided the seminar into three sessions. The first session is to bring every participant to the same page regardless of their theological background or seminary training. I do not start off in showing them what is wrong without principlization, but to demonstrate the value of principlization and what is right. I want to bring to their attention that most Scriptures cannot be applied directly and that a bridge is needed to bring the text to life. I want to leave in their minds a bridge which crosses and connects the two worlds. At the end of the first session, I will tell them that the purpose of principlization is not just pragmatic, but it is mainly to retain the authoritative element in application, doing justice to the text.

In the second session, I will introduce the ladder of abstraction and will show participants how to abstract by looking for the vision of God and the human depravity factor. Throughout this abstraction and particularizing of scriptural texts, participants will also be taught to recognize different degrees of authority. They should be able to picture an abstraction ladder as they enter into the third session.

By the third session, participants should be able to principlize a given passage. Assuming they have mastered the technique, they will learn how to validate their findings along the process. Participants will learn how to utilize authorial intent and literary forms as their guardrails in their abstraction and contextualization.

⁴ The seminar can be conducted in any of the following formats: (1) a one day seminar; (2) three sessions over a weekend, or (3) a session a week for three consecutive weeks.

Road Tests

I have tested the seminar materials twice. The first time only session one of the seminar was covered. The second time the full seminar was presented. I received feedback from each presentation, and adjustments are already reflected in the seminar outlined in chapter four. I plan to continue to road test and receive feedback, especially from local pastors, beyond this thesis.

Road Test #1: Alliance Bible Seminary, Cheung Chau, Hong Kong.

Date: November 9, 2006

Participants: 120 students ranging from first year Bachelor of Theology students to last year Master of Theology students. It was an after-class seminar sponsored by the student council and attended voluntarily.

Format and content: One and a half hour introduction covering the concept of two foundations and the need of a universal timeless principle to bridge between them. A two-page handout was distributed.

Feedback: The seminar was interactive, and students were encouraged to ask clarification questions along the way. After the seminar, five students came and discussed the issues with me for another 75 minutes. Their questions focused on the reasons for the principlization process. Four of them expressed appreciation for the guidance in how to principlize a passage, free it from its historical-cultural boundaries, and make it readily relevant for today. One of them struggled with the method because he did not understand why our actions cannot be directly modeled after those of biblical characters. I spent about twenty minutes convincing him of the necessity of authoritative application, not just application. All five of the students who talked with me afterwards

agreed that the examples I used helped them to visualize the issues and the advantages of principlization. Two of them said that they had heard about the term, but had never given much thought to it. The other three admitted that this was their first exposure to such a concept. They asked for more examples and literature for further exploration. A day after the seminar, another three submitted their sermons, unsolicited, to me over the internet and requested my comments.

Reflection: It was a refreshing experience for me to see such an eager group of participants. They reinforced my idea of the necessity of principlization. From the feedback, I have added “It is a Matter of Authority” to the first session. Initially, this portion was covered at the end of my second session with the “Certainty of Authority.” Since participants from different backgrounds may struggle with the necessity of the process, I have rearranged it within the first session. I also added Example 5 to the material to give them a deeper appreciation of how the method will further benefit their interpretation.

Road Test #2: Christian Witness Theological Seminary, Concord, California

Date: November 28 and December 5, 2006

Participants: 16-18 students and pastors in various degree or non-degree programs. The majority of them are experienced pastors from South East Asia. A handful was from the house churches in Mainland China. In general, they are mature leaders, but with diverse theological backgrounds. After the first session break, two more students joined the class because they had heard “good things” about the seminar.

Format and content: I guest-lectured three two-hour sessions of a regular hermeneutics class spanning over two weeks. I taught two consecutive sessions on November 28, then

another session the week after. The seminar outlined in chapter four is an upgraded version of these three sessions.

Feedback: In session one, I encouraged the students to ask questions along the way and entertained their questions. They asked for clarification and many philosophical questions. To a point, they prevented me from finishing my pre-determined goal. A good philosophical issue was raised, “What took Christians so long to come up with this process of principlization? Haven’t believers been applying the Scriptures for these many hundreds of years?” He asked with a tone of disbelief that principlization is the method to bridge the two worlds. Some struggled with why the allegorical approach is not a valid method of applying the Scripture. In sessions two and three, I allotted the last fifteen minutes of each hour to entertain their questions and solicited critiques about my teaching. Because many participants are experienced pastors, the questions they raised and the critiques they gave were invaluable. After class, I personally solicited comments from the two professors who were there with the students.

Reflection: This was my first experience with Mainland China house church leaders. Initially, they struggled with the idea of authoritative application. They felt it was too constricting because it limits God’s work in human lives. It took me extra effort to revisit the concept of authority and finally came up with Weaver’s hierarchy on the spot before they came to grips with what authority we were talking about. Seeing their experience and maturity, I limited their questions to the last fifteen minutes of every hour and opened up time for them to critique my teaching. I learned to emphasize the value of the principlization process and to be less critical of other inadequate approaches. Examples 5 through 7 gave them an “Aha!” feeling when they saw what authoritative applications are.

In session one, I taught them deductively. For them, the concepts were too abstract, and they asked too many questions before I could illustrate them with examples.

In session two, I adjusted and taught them inductively instead of deductively. That is, I began with a passage and demonstrated the point, then afterwards, pointed out the method and theories. They learned much faster, and they asked fewer questions. However, one issue kept coming up. They were more interested in the product than the process. Initially, they focused on dissecting the many levels of application and identifying my “model” answer to the number of levels. They had to be reminded time and again that the process is more important than the product. By the end of the lesson, they appreciated the Ladder of Abstraction and saw how it can be applied to their own application and preaching.

In session three, which was a week after the first two sessions, seeing how some of the questions that they had raised could be better answered, I reinforced the abstracting process with Example 9 and a section on “sidewalk” passages. Due to the limits of time, I skimmed over authorial intent and literary form without much discussion.

As a result of this experience, I added Weaver’s hierarchy to my session one and Example 9 and a section on sidewalk passages to session two. From their input, I improved the wording and designs of a few figures that were misleading. I also arranged my material inductively and spent more time on the example passages than I initially had planned.

Difficulties and Struggles

There have been three struggles along the way in finishing this project. They are struggles about: (1) the nature and focus of the project, (2) the organization of materials, and (3) preparing a seminar to unseen participants.

The Nature and Focus of the Project

My original plan was to go the academic route and finish my thesis in two to three years after my last residency. But in March 2006, I learned that Dr. Robinson would be retiring and that we are his last cohort that he will advise through the thesis. With both professors strongly suggesting a year turn-around time for the thesis, I felt rushed and was off my original plan.

A sense of lostness set in when I had to choose where my thesis was heading. I knew my interest was in sermon application, but I had no idea how to turn it into a thesis capable of fulfilling the degree requirements. The Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry Manual specified nine research methods,⁵ and the Dallas Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry Manual specified four models.⁶ They were all feasible projects for me. It took me almost six months to mentally adjust from a research approach to my thesis to a project/seminar approach. It was especially helpful when I

⁵ The nine methods are (1) Historical analysis; (2) Cross-Cultural Analysis; (3) Experimentation; (4) Participant Observation; (5) Survey research and Statistical Analysis; (6) Content Analysis; (7) Bibliographic research; (8) Descriptive Research; and (9) Evaluative Research. See *Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Doctor of Ministry Program*, (South Hamilton, MA: Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2004), 56-57.

⁶ The four models are: (1) Descriptive surveys of a ministry situation; (2) Program development and education; (3) Program evaluation and response; and (4) Case studies of ongoing ministry situation. See *The Doctor of Ministry Program Student Handbook* (Dallas, TX: Dallas Theological Seminary, 2005), 28.

received back my first two thesis draft outlines from Dr. Robinson showing me where my emphasis ought to be.

The Organization of Materials

After I have decided the product would be a seminar, I struggled with what to include in such a seminar and what belongs to the theological and biblical reflection chapter prefacing the seminar. I knew I had more than enough material to prove the necessity of and teach the process of theological principlization. However, my concerns were organizational—discerning what methods and techniques were essential, yet concrete enough to include in an eight-hour seminar versus what methods and techniques were important merely in guiding the path to theological principlization.

In addition, there was another organizational struggle. While composing the thesis, I struggled to distinguish the differences in content between chapters two and four. It seemed like I was covering the same material. However, the difference became more clear after I road tested my materials. This is why after I finished writing chapter one, I wrote chapter four. With chapter four finished, I had more clarity on what I needed to include in chapter two.

A Seminar to Unseen Participants

When I first designed the seminar, I had no specific audience in mind. On one hand, I adhered to Dr. Buzzell's advice to write from the perspective of a student who, sometime in the future, may check out my thesis to learn about the topic. On the other hand, to fulfill the Doctor of Ministry track requirements, it had to be something about preaching or being a preacher. To conduct a seminar for pastors, I need to imagine who

they are. However, because I have been an independent local Bible church pastor for the past fifteen years, I am not active in the academic circles and have had limited contact with other pastors.

I struggled with my project until I road-tested the materials. After the road test, I learned some concrete audience needs that expedited my process of consolidating the seminar.

What I Have Learned

About Theological Principization

This topic is of little interest to the average pastor/preachers, let alone average Christians. This point was reflected among the Sacramento pastors. On one occasion, a seminary professor⁷ commenting about my seminar said that people are more interested in ready-help seminars like “Biblical Principles of How to Manage Your Finances” or “Principles of a Happy Christian Home” than learning about developing and validating principles which are authoritative. They are more interested in practical help (products) than they are in process. Preachers are no exception to this observation.

Academically, I am able to integrate what Greidanus, Chapell and a few others are saying in respect to the ladder of abstraction. Before putting the seminar together, I saw them as separate and distinct models of application. When I was forced to think through chapter two and began writing chapter four, I asked myself, “What needs to

⁷ Comment made by James Ip, Dean of Christian Witness Theological Seminary, on December 5, 2006 after my seminar.

be abstracted?” It was from that angle I began to see the connection between Greidanus, Chapell, and many others.

Principlization is a process, not a product. Preachers must keep on refining a principle until they reach the one that best connects the text and the audience. They may have to adjust the level of abstraction when situations and audience change. Warren calls this process retroduction.⁸ Everding and Wilbanks see it as response in the decision-making process.⁹ All these mean that there is not one final, absolute product.

During my research, I identified five to seven different aspects of the principlization process. Later, I qualified them into two movements: the vertical and the horizontal for clarity. There are two aspects I have not dealt with in the seminar: (1) the role of one's worldview throughout the process, and (2) the community factor in application. Both are on the audience's side of the ladder. “Recommendations for Further Studies” will introduce them.

About Teaching Theological Principlization

Two things I learned in presenting the seminar. First, present in a positive note. Do not sound too harsh on the other approaches. They may be inadequate, but they may have their role to a certain type of genre as Scro suggests.¹⁰ Participants may be more receptive when I begin the seminar with the advantages of principlization than the inadequacy of existing approaches. This positive approach will lower the defense mechanisms of the participants as they reflect upon their own approaches.

⁸ T. S. Warren, “A Paradigm for Preaching,” 474-84.

⁹ Everding and Wilbanks, 31-52.

¹⁰ Scro, 269-82.

Second, present the materials inductively. That is, present the passage examples before explaining the methods and theories. Because participants are able to see the concepts more clearly when they are in concrete terms rather than as abstract ideas, they are more ready to learn about the process and whatever new biblical insights they can glean from using it.

Recommendations for Further Studies

There are three areas that deserve further development and study: (1) seminars that cater to a specific genre; (2) tensions within the process; and (3) the role of one's worldview and the community factor.

Seminars that Cater to Specific Genres

The seminar presented is a very general one that fills the void of how to principle a passage. Although the method can be applied to different literary genres, I believe more refined seminars can be developed that would take into account specific literary forms.

Tensions within the Process

Harbin identifies and discusses six tensions involved in the principization process.¹¹ I may add two more: (1) transferring vs. non-transferring elements, and (2) the concise vs. precise principle.

¹¹ Harbin, 93. These six tensions are listed on page 67.

Transferring vs. Non-Transferring Elements

Greidanus is against transferring elements of the text across the historical-cultural gap, arguing that only the original message can be transferred.¹² I illustrated this in figure 2.2 and qualified those elements as isolated elements of the text. I also observed that abstraction is almost inevitable in bringing the text to today's application.¹³ However, Litfin, in search for commonality between the modern listeners and Euodia and Syntyche of Philippi (Phil. 4:2), constructed an audience-related ladder as follows:

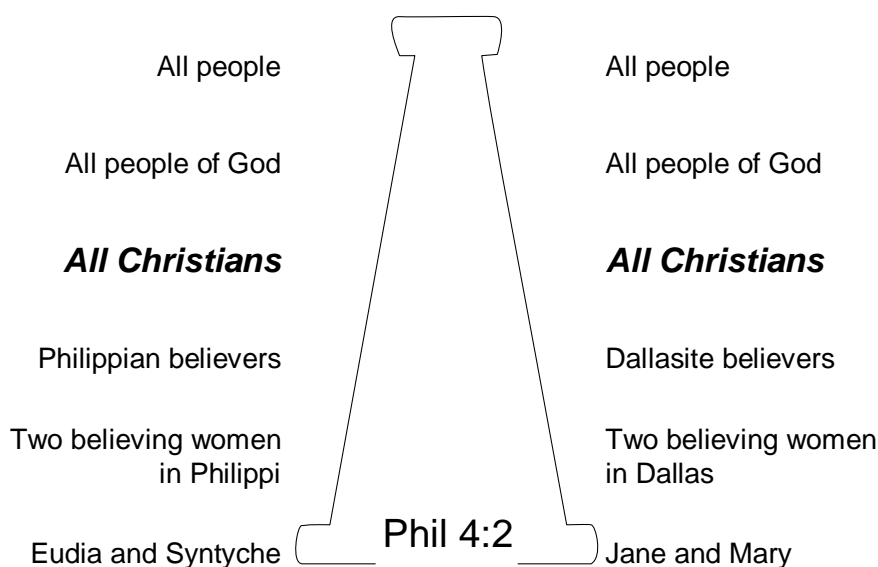


Figure 5.1 Litfin's Audience-Related Ladder of Abstraction¹⁴

Scro introduced a situational-ladder for Daniel's public prayer (Dan. 6):

¹² Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 167. What Greidanus refers to as "transferring" may resemble what I refer to as "abstraction" in this thesis.

¹³ See page 24.

¹⁴ A. Duane Litfin, notes from the 903 *Preaching and Exegesis* class, Dallas Theological Seminary, Fall 1980.

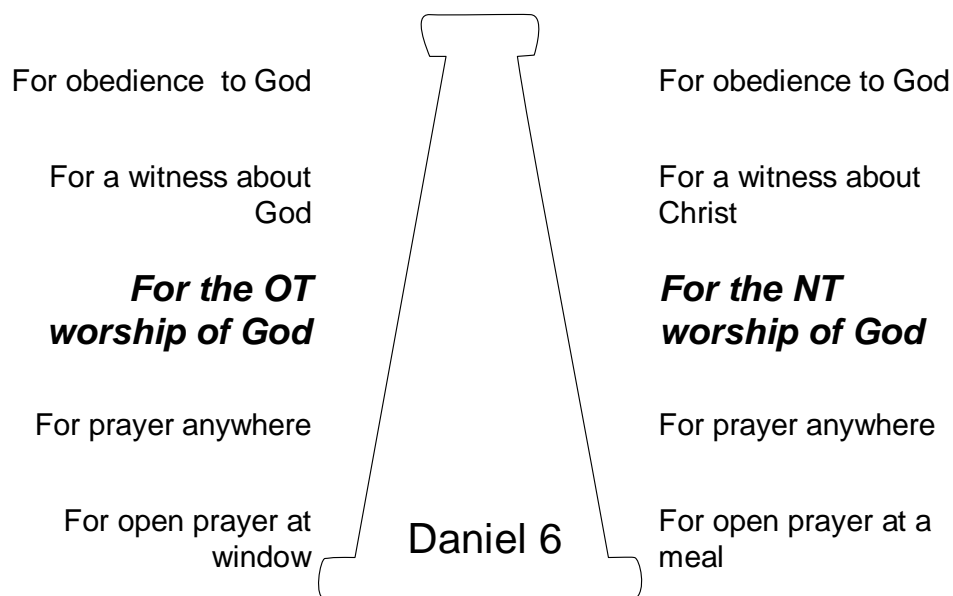


Figure 5.2 Scro's Situational Ladder of Abstraction¹⁵

Apparently there are discrepancies between what Greidanus is advocating (not to abstract individual elements) and what Litfin and Scro are demonstrating (abstracting individual elements). What elements can be transferred and which ones cannot be transferred? How can one determine what are the isolated elements? Isolated from what? From the message? Or are there any other criteria to govern or reconcile these differences? All these questions deserve further investigation and clarification.

Concise vs. Precise Principle

This tension pertains more to methodology than philosophy. A good principle should be both concise and precise, but we have to find a way to present it. Conciseness gives clarity, yet is abstract enough that modern listeners will know how to apply a

¹⁵ Scro, 279-80.

principle to their individual situations. Preciseness is the detailed uniqueness of a principle which governs when it can be applied. It has to do with the conditions dictated by the text and common to modern listeners before such a principle applies. The idea is there. It is how preachers should present these criteria in a clear manner. Preachers can word these conditional parameters into the principle statement, but it can become lumbering and lose its conciseness. Scro proposes an applicational model similar to the model an interpretivist judge uses in applying the Constitution to the lives of people. He adds another component—claim to the application which describes the specific situation.¹⁶ It may not be the only way, but certainly a way to start with. This deserves further study.

Investigate the Two Aspects

There are two aspects related to the audience's side of the ladder that deserve further investigation and how they may affect the process: (1) the role of one's worldview throughout the process,¹⁷ and (2) the community factor in application.¹⁸ What role do they play, if any, in the process of principlization? What restrictions, if any, should preachers put on them to make the principlization as objective as possible? Or, at what stage should these aspects be introduced to the process?

¹⁶ Ibid., 260-310. See also chapter three, footnote #21.

¹⁷ Cf. Rob Barrett, "Models for a Theology of Biblical Application"; "The Image of God and Human Responsibility" in Everding and Wilbanks, *Decision Making and the Bible*, 79-104; David Crabtree, "Building a Biblical Worldview" and David Crabtree, "Applying God's Worldview" in Ron Julian, et al. *The Language of God: A Commonsense Approach to Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 161-220.

¹⁸ Cf. Everding. and Wilbanks, 105-29; Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, 34; and Christopher J. H. Wright, *Walking in the Ways of the Lord: The Ethical Authority of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 20-24.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I have outlined a seminar for equipping pastors with the process of principlization. This is a seminar that facilitates authoritative application. It shows how preachers can apply the Scripture with confidence. The “Theological and Biblical Reflections” lays the framework for the necessity and validity of principlization. Both the “Literature Review” and “Bibliography” focus on theological principlization. This lays a foundation for those who can bring the study to the next level. Lastly, in “Recommendations for Further Studies,” I identify several possible studies and developments that preachers can add to the few written techniques of principlization.

APPENDIX 1

SESSION ONE: PRINCIPLIZATION

Key concepts: Principlization is a bridge-building process to link biblical texts to modern listeners.

This process carries the authority of “thus says the Lord.”

Purpose: To know what the process of principlization is.

To understand the reasons why it is necessary.

To appreciate the advantages of principlization in interpretation and application.

Objectives: Participants will be able to name the three components of application.

Participants will be able to write out simple principles from a passage.

Participants will be able to state the reasons of principlizing.

Participants will be able to principlize a simple passage.

Participants will be able to identify where an application’s authority rests based on Weaver’s Hierarchy of Values.

Format: Class lecture with questions and answers; exercises and examples.

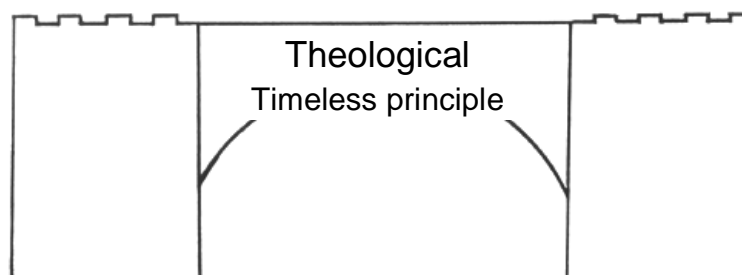
Session One: Principlization

Preview: What is principlization?
Why principlization?

What is Principlization?

A Bridge-Building Process

- Three Components of Principlization



Two Foundations

- Text: Answering Four Questions

- Audience:

Examples

- Jesus washing his disciples' feet, John 13:1-17.

- Wearing clothing of the opposite gender, Deuteronomy 22:5.

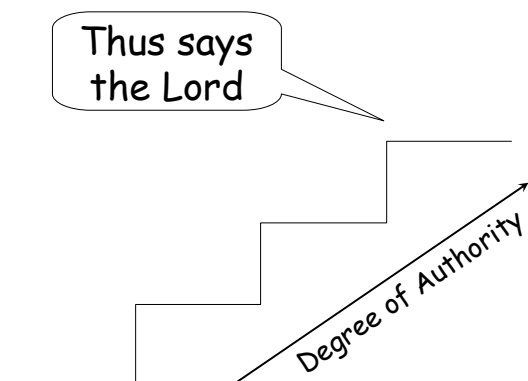
- Woman's clothing and adornments, 1 Timothy 2:9.

- Handling incest among God's people, Leviticus 20:11; 1 Corinthians 5:1-2.

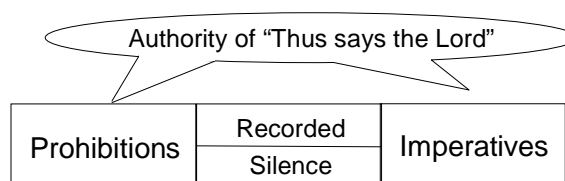
- Handling an adulterous woman, John 8:3-6; Leviticus 20:10.

Why Principlization?

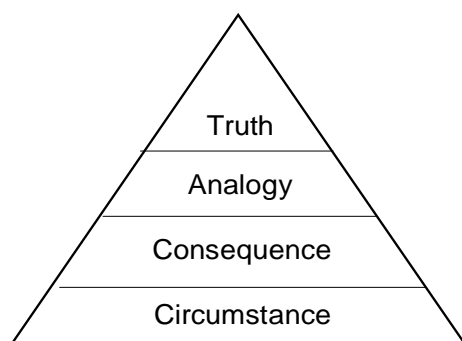
A Matter of Authority



- What is biblical?



Weaver's Hierarchy of Values



Next Session: How to Principlize?

APPENDIX 2

SESSION TWO: THE LADDER OF ABSTRACTION

Key concepts: There are two processes to principlization: generalization and particularizing.

The Ladder of Abstraction is a technique to generalize a principle.

Purpose: To generalize principles from a biblical text using the Ladder of Abstraction.

To evaluate the level of authority that each principle carries.

Objectives: Participants will be able to explain the three levels of application in 1 Corinthians 8.

Participants will be able to write out different levels of principle from a passage by asking why's.

Participants will be able to define the vision of God and human depravity factors.

Participants will be able to assess an application with different levels of authority.

Format: Class lecture with questions and answers; exercises and examples.

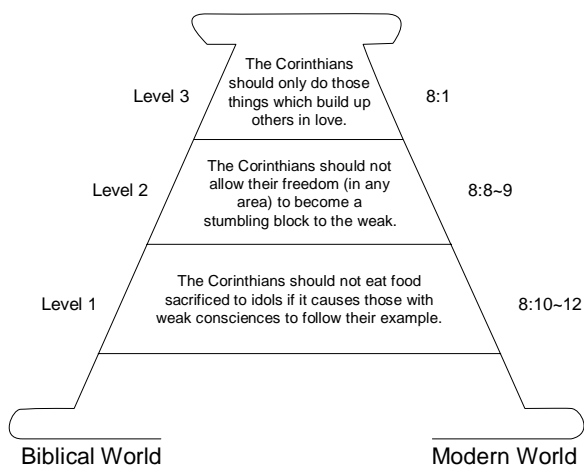
Session Two: The Ladder of Abstraction

Preview: How to principlize?
 Ladder of Abstraction
 How to abstract?
 Certainty of Authority

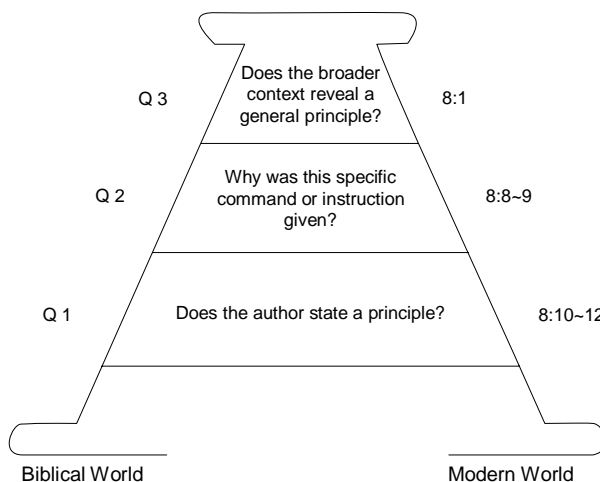
How to Principlize?

Examples

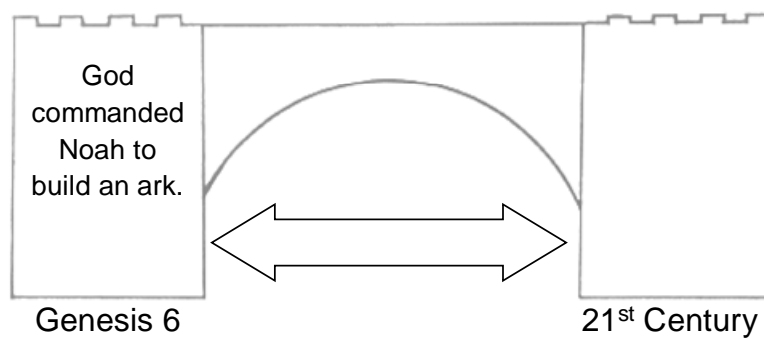
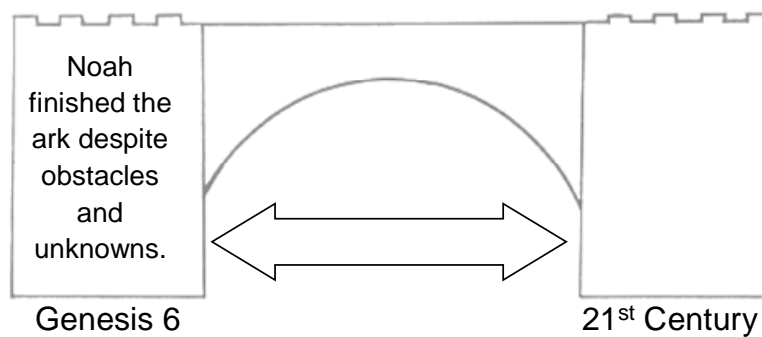
- Eating food sacrificed to idols, 1 Corinthians 8.



Ladder of Abstraction



- God instructed Noah to build an ark, Genesis 6:9-22.



Limits on the Ladder of Abstraction

- “Sidewalk” passages

- “You shall not murder,” Exodus 20:13; Matthew 5:21.

- “Do not muzzle an ox,” Deuteronomy 25:4; 1 Corinthians 9:9

Certainty of Authority

Next Session: Validating the Principles

APPENDIX 3

SESSION THREE: VALIDATING THE PRINCIPLES

Key concepts: All abstracted principles require validation.

All techniques used in exegesis are also valid in validating
principlization process.

Purpose: To validate, put some control, on the process of principlizing.

To evaluate a given principle from the perspective of Authorial
intent and literary forms.

Objectives: Participants will be able to state the Authorial intent of a given
passage.

Participants will be able to identify the adjustments required to
interpret a given passage based on its genre.

Format: Class lecture with questions and answers; exercises and examples.

Session Three: Validation

Preview: The need of validation
Identify the Authorial intent
Literary form plays a role

The Need of Validation

Identify the Authorial Intent

Five Questions to Ask

- The Story of Infant Jesus, Matthew 2.

Literary Form Plays a Role

- Genealogy of Jesus, Matthew 1:1-17.

- Creation Account, Genesis 1.

APPENDIX 4: EXERCISES

1. Ephesians 6:5
Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.
2. Deuteronomy 14:21d
Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk.
3. Exodus 20:23
Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.
4. Proverbs 22:28
Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers.
5. Acts 1:8
“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
6. Romans 8:28
And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
7. Proverbs 22:6
Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.

8. The great commission Matthew 28:19-20
9. Joy in midst of trials James 1:2-4
10. The good Samaritan Luke 10:38-42
11. The choosing of the seven Acts 6:1-7
12. The blessed man Psalm 1
13. Praise the Lord Psalm 117
14. The temptation of Jesus Matthew 4:1-11
15. The parable of the workers in the vineyard Matthew 20:1-16
16. Mary and Martha Luke 10:25-37
17. Jesus heals a paralytic Mark 2:1-12

APPENDIX 5: GROWING ON YOUR OWN

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VITA

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